DEFENSE POLICY IN THE MINNEAPOLIS TRIAL

1—A Criticism by Grandizo Munis

2—An Answer by James P. Cannon

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— CONTENTS —

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Introductory Note

On July 15, 1941 an indictment prepared by the United States Department of Justice was handed down by a federal grand jury in St. Paul, Minnesota, against 29 members of the Socialist Workers Party and Motor Transport Workers Local 544-CIO. It had been preceded by raids on the branch offices of the party in St. Paul and Minneapolis, in which large quantities of literature had been carted off by the FBI. The indictment was on two counts: (1) conspiracy to overthrow the government by force and violence—the statute involved was adopted in 1861 against the slaveholders' rebellion; (2) conspiracy to *advocate* such overthrow and to incite disaffection in the armed forces, being a violation of the Smith "Gag" Law of 1940.

The trial opened in Minneapolis October 27 and lasted five weeks. The jury was out 58 hours. All defendants were acquitted on the first count. Eighteen defendants, including the outstanding leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, were convicted on the second count. On December 8—the day the United States declared war—twelve defendants were given 16-month prison sentences and six were sentenced to terms of a year and a day. At present all are out on bail while the convictions are being appealed to the higher courts.

The policy of the defense in this historic trial is analyzed and discussed in the following pages from two different points of view. Grandizo Munis criticizes the courtroom policy of the defendants and James P. Cannon defends it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

I. A Criticism of the Minneapolis Trial, *by Grandizo Munis*... 5

1. The Struggle Against Imperialist War 6

2. Transition to Socialism, Advocating and Employing Violence 11

II. Political Principles and Propaganda Methods. *by James P. Cannon* 16

1. Our Strategy in the Trial 16

2. The Setting of the Trial.....19

3. Violence and the Transition to Socialism.....21

4. Is It Correct to Say We Prefer a Peaceful Transition?...36

5. "Submitting to the Majority".....40

6. Marxism and War 46

7. Marxism and Sabotage.....55

8. Defensive Formulations and the Organization of Action..58

A Criticism of the Minneapolis Trial

By GRANDIZO MUNIS

The initiation on the part of the United States government of a prosecution of the Socialist Workers Party and of the leaders of the Drivers Union of Minneapolis made us fear a decapitation, even though temporary, of our American movement. It filled us with a joyful hope at the same time, sure that the persecution by the bourgeois tribunals would popularize our revolutionary ideas when it gave our militants the opportunity to expound them completely and valiantly. It has been the norm and pride of the world revolutionary movement since the ringing reply of Louisa Michel to her judges and of Karl Marx to the Bismarckian tribunal, to convert the accused into accusers and to employ the witness stand as a fortress from which to attack the reactionary powers. This attitude has been one of the principal forces of attraction of the revolutionary movement.

I experienced the first uneasiness that these results would be wasted totally or partially on reading the first published statement (THE MILITANT, Vol. V, No. 29) that seems to have set the tone for all the following statements. I recovered hope during the first sessions of the trial, during which our comrades energetically brought out the reactionary role of the government aided by Tobin against the Drivers of 544-CIO. But I again considered as lost a goodly part of the political benefits of the trial on reading the fundamental speeches and questionings of Comrade Cannon by Comrade Goldman, and by the prosecutor (Schweinhaut). It was there, replying to the political accusations—struggle against the war, advocacy of violence, overthrow of the government by force—where it was necessary to have raised the tone and turn the tables, accuse the government and the bourgeoisie of a reactionary conspiracy; of permanent violence against the majority of the population, physical, economic, moral, educative violence; of launching the population into a slaughter also by means of violence in order to defend the Sixty Families. On the contrary, it is on arriving at this part that the trial visibly weakens, our comrades shrink themselves, minimize the revolutionary significance of their ideas, try to make an honor-

able impression on the jury without taking into consideration that they should talk for the masses. For moments they border on a renunciation of principles. A few good words by Goldman in his closing speech cannot negate the lamentable, negative impression of his first speech and of the interrogation of Cannon.

I shall begin to criticize them by citing their words, taken textually from numbers 45, 47, 48, 50, 52, Volume V, of THE MILITANT.

Goldman in his opening statement to the jury:

> "I repeat: *The objective and the aim of the party was to win through education and through propaganda a majority of the people of the United States.*" (Underlined in the original.)

It is exactly the same as the statement in July before the beginning of the trial. Answering a criticism made then from Mexico, a comrade of certain responsibility in the SWP replied that there was no need to worry because no one was in agreement with that statement. If no one was in agreement, then it was necessary to formulate another, that is evident, unless we have one policy for the masses and another for appearances before a bourgeois judge. It is hardly necessary to indicate the error of such a statement. It is understood by all, beginning by the one who made the statement, that our objective can in no way be only propaganda, nor will we win the majority by means of it. We are a party of propaganda in the sense that our numerical proportion prevents us or limits us to a minimum of action. But we are a party of revolutionary action—economic, political and educative—in essence and potentially, because our propaganda itself can tend only to action and only through action will we conquer the majority of the exploited and educate them for the taking of power.

I insist on these commonplaces because the euphemistic, sweetened character of this preliminary statement of Goldman, designed to reconcile the jury, is a compromise that has forced later statements much more grave. We will see further on.

Let us take the main problems and see how they have been dealt with in the trial.

1. The Struggle Against Imperialist War

Goldman begins with the following statement:

> "We shall show that the Socialist Workers Party opposes sabotage. We shall show that Mr. Anderson's claim is absolutely wrong and based on no foundation whatever to the effect that we prefer the enemy, the imperialistic enemy of the United States, to defeat our

government. It is absolutely false. What we want, as the evidence will show, is to have the workers and farmers establish their own government, and then to continue a real war against fascism."

Cannon even goes a bit further, replying to a question by Goldman:

"A decision has been made, and is accepted by a majority of the people, to go to war. Our comrades have to comply with that."

And then Goldman asks: "You would not support the war?"

Cannon: "That is what I mean, we would not support the war in a political sense."

And he even returns again to the point:

"We consider Hitler and Hitlerism the greatest enemy of mankind. We want to wipe it off the face of the earth. The reason we do not support a declaration of war by American arms, is because we do not believe the American capitalists can defeat Hitler and fascism. We think Hitlerism can be destroyed only by way of conducting a war under the leadership of the workers."

In the first place, the decision to go to war has *not* "been made and accepted by a majority of the people." This statement can be criticized very strongly, a statement that we would censure very energetically if it were made by a centrist. In place of accusing the government of leading the American people to the slaughter against the will of the majority, instead of accusing it emphatically before the masses and of demonstrating to them how the parliamentarian majority acts against the majority of the people, Cannon endorses Roosevelt's decision as if it really corresponded to the majority of the people.

Yes, we submit to the war and our militants go to war, but not because it is a decision of the majority, but rather because it is imposed upon us by the violence of the bourgeois society just as wage exploitation is imposed. As in the factory, we should take advantage of all the opportunities to fight against the war and against the system that produces it, just as we fight against the boss in a factory, as a function of the general struggle against the capitalist system.

"We would not support the war in a political sense," says Cannon. Do we support it, perhaps, in some other sense? Social, economic? I do not see other senses. Does he perhaps mean by "to support" to accept the accomplished fact and to go to war? That is, to submit oneself, as we submit to the conditions imposed by a boss after the failure of a strike, but preparing ourselves for another. Why, then, equivocate so dangerously? I see no other reason but that our comrades have committed the very grave error of

talking for a petty-bourgeois jury for the more immediate present, not foreseeing the future struggles. Would it not have been better to state: "We submit to your war, American bourgeois, because the violence of your society imposes it on us, the material violence of your arms. But the masses will turn against you. From today on, our party is with the masses in an irreconcilable struggle against your regime of oppression, misery and butchery. Therefore we will fight against your war with all means."

The equivocation and inexactness are permanent. It seems that we are platonic opponents of the war and that we limit ourselves to statements and propaganda, written or verbal, without action of any kind. To say that "we do not support a declaration of war because we do not believe the American capitalists can defeat Hitler and fascism" is to give the understanding that we would support it if we believed in that defeat; this induces those who believe in the victory of the United States to support it. Our rejection of the war is based on the character of the social regime that produces it, not on this or that belief about the defeat of fascism.

Immediately comes another equivocation: "We think Hitlerism can be destroyed, etc." Uniting that to the reiterated statements to the effect that we will not agitate among the soldiers, that we are a "political opposition" to the war, and to the, until now, limping exposition of military training under union control, can induce one to believe that we will be for the war *when* the control has been given to the unions. I believe it is necessary to clarify this, without leaving room for equivocation and I pronounce myself, for my part, against the war, even if control of the military service is achieved by the unions.

Immediately, Cannon undertakes to give a program for defeating Hitler by means of a Workers' and Farmers' Government. I don't have to add a single comma, except that the entire questioning of Cannon closes with a double door, the road to establish the Workers' and Farmers' Government:

> **"Goldman: Now until such time as the workers and farmers in the United States establish their own government and use their own methods to defeat Hitler, the S.W.P. must submit to the majority of the people—is that right?**
>
> **"Cannon: That is all we can do. That is what we propose to do."**

All of which is the equivalent of folding one's arms after some lectures about the marvels of the Workers' and Farmers' Government, in the hope that this will be formed by itself, or by God knows what sleight-of-hand.

This does not deal merely with an omission, but with a statement of passivity in the face of the imperialist war; something which at best is a bad education for the workers who have become interested in the trial and does not grant us any credit for tomorrow when the masses begin to act against the war.

Forced by statements of this sort—decidedly opportunist, I do not hesitate to say—Cannon sees himself obliged to ask for the expulsion from the party of the militants who organize protests in the army. He is carried to the incredible, to reject Lenin, Trotsky and Cannon himself.

Mr. Schweinhaut reads Cannon a paragraph of Lenin's from *The Revolution of* 1905:

"'It is our duty in time of an uprising to exterminate ruthlessly all the chiefs of the civil and military authorities.' You disagree with that?

"Cannon: Yes, I don't know that that is in any way a statement of our party policy. We do not agree with the extermination of anybody unless it is in case of an actual armed struggle when the rules of war apply."

But, what is "an uprising" except an armed struggle? Lenin also does not say "anybody" but rather the civil and military chiefs. Then why reject the paragraph?

Citing Cannon himself, Schweinhaut reads:

"'The second point (struggle in the army) is to be careful, cautious. Make no putsches, make no premature moves that expose us and separate us from the masses. Go with the masses. . . . And how can we get these military means except by penetrating the army as it exists?'

"Schweinhaut: But you do not think that would obstruct the military effort of the army?

"Cannon: If you will read it again, you will see that we do not want any putsches. We say to the members: 'Do not make any putsches, and do not obstruct the army.' It is our direct instruction to our people not to create obstruction of the military operations, but to confine their efforts to propaganda."

I am wholeheartedly behind Cannon in his speech; but I categorically condemn Cannon before the jury, deforming himself, minimizing, reducing to words the revolutionary action of the party. And I will be equally behind and I propose that the party be behind the militants and soldiers who carry out acts of protests in the army, remembering that they do not deal with "putsches, premature movements." Revolutionary action in time of war is absolutely impossible without obstructing in a greater or less degree the military activities. Therefore, the principle of revolution-

ary defeatism, which the American party and the International have and cannot renounce. Contrary to what Goldman gave to understand in the first quotation, we are for the intensification of the class struggle, in the rearguard and in the army, including, if this can, provoking the defeat of our bourgeoisie: "From the point of view of a revolution in their own country, the defeat of their own imperialist government is undoubtedly the better evil" (Trotsky, June 1940). It is worse in advice to the workers to disauthorize agitation and protests in the army, only to speak against it. I believe that our comrades have lost a good opportunity to make the workers understand why they should act always by means of the word and by means of collective actions. The questioning of Cannon presented a completely false perspective to the workers, of comfortable propaganda, where it deals with a terrible struggle by all means from small protests to insurrections by groups, from partial fraternizations to wiping out the fronts. But, from an error of perspective, one passes to an error of fact; therefore the defendants saw themselves forced to condemn sabotage in general, as though it dealt with something criminal. I believe that sabotage is a method for tactical use whose application at certain moments can be productive of contrary effects to what is intended but which is absolutely indispensable in the critical moments of struggle.

An example will demonstrate it. Suppose that in a certain part of the front conditions of fraternization are produced. Fraternization will never be produced simultaneously on both sides of a large front, nor in the same proportion. Immediately the military chiefs will give orders to mobilize, attack or reinforce the fronts with soldiers less disposed to embrace the "enemy." Is it not our duty then to sabotage in the greatest degree the renewal of combat, to give time to the fraternization, to impede the command from dominating the situation? Sabotage will be the only means at hand for the soldiers to extend and precipitate the fraternization, until the fall of *the two* fronts. Nevertheless, there exists the danger that the enemy command may dominate its front and taking advantage of the disorganization, undertake a victorious offensive. There is no way out for an effective fraternization if one wishes to avoid that "danger."

Sabotage and defeatism will unite at a certain moment as the two main elements in the reactions of the masses against the imperialist war. The party should not and cannot renounce defeatism without condemning itself to a perpetual sterile chat against the war.

What seems even more lamentable to me is that one can intuit from the trial that it is not only a question of something said especially for the jury. For moments there is evidence that the defendants really consider sabotage a crime. If I am not mistaken—and I hope I am—this is a dangerous moral predisposition. Sabotage will be the reaction of the masses against the imperialist war. Why be ashamed of it? Why be ashamed that the masses react, as they can, against the monstrous crime of the present war? It would have been easy to defend it as a principle and throw the responsibility on the leaders of the present war. Can we condemn the future sabotage of the masses when the war is a gigantic sabotage of the bourgeoisie against the masses, against civilization and humanity? Instead of receiving this idea, the workers who heard our comrades will have left, burdened with a prejudice against sabotage.

2. Transition to Socialism, Advocating and Employing Violence

Says Goldman:

"The evidence will further show as Mr. Anderson himself indicated, that we prefer a peaceful transition to socialism; but that we analyze all the conditions in society, we analyze history, and on the basis of this analysis we predict, *we predict*, that after the majority of the people in the United States will want socialism established, that the minority, organized by the financiers and by capitalists, will use violence to prevent the establishment of socialism. That is what we predict."

Why not ask forgiveness, besides, for seeing ourselves painfully obliged to employ violence against the bourgeoisie? Even neutralizing oneself to a mere diviner, the prediction is completely false. It is not necessary to poke into the future to discover the violence of the reactionary minority throughout society. The accusation lends itself ideally to launching a thorough attack against capitalist society and to show the American workers that the so-called American democracy is no more than a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Among the workers who have read or listened to Cannon and Goldman, there must be many who have experienced the daily violence of bourgeois society, during strikes, demonstrations, meetings; all of them without exception experience the normal violence of either working for a wage established in the labor market or of perishing; a violence much more lamentable is the imposition of the war; educative violence; informative violence imposed by the newspaper trusts. Far from receiving a notion of

the environment in which they live and far from preparing their spirit for rebellion against this environment, the workers watching the trial have been pacified in respect to the present. Only in the future will the bourgeoisie employ violence.

Besides, it is completely inexact and contributes toward putting the workers to sleep, to tell them that the bourgeoisie will employ violence "after the majority of the people in the United States will want socialism established." It uses violence already, always employs it, the bourgeoisie knows of no other method of government but violence. The workers and farmers should respond to the daily violence of the bourgeoisie with majority and organized violence of the poor masses. We do not predict, but rather we assure, we ask, we advocate temporary violence of the majority against the permanent organic violence of the reactionary minority. It is necessary to break the democratic prejudices of the American proletariat; but statements like that rock them to sleep.

"After all," an inexpert worker may say, "what certainty can one have that the bourgeoisie will employ violence. These men who know a lot, only predict it; then for the moment, I need not organize to counter the violence of the reactionaries." This tendency to inaction will be accentuated if the worker in question continues reading: "We expect to prove that the defendants never advocated, never incited, to violence, but simply predicted the violence of the reactionary minority." It is clear when they do not do that, it is not yet necessary.

And once more, as we saw in the case of the war, all possibility of inciting to action is closed by the preliminary obstruction. Following their sense, the perspective presented by our comrades for the coming years is also false.

What means will be valuable to us for conquering the majority of the proletariat and poor farmers? (Not merely the people as is repeated constantly in the examination. The petty-bourgeoisie can be neutralized without being won over.)

I do not find in the long pages of the interrogation of Cannon anything else than propaganda, propaganda and more propaganda, as if it dealt with recommending a patent medicine for baldness. A brief paragraph, uttered in a good direction by Cannon, is not, unfortunately, sufficiently explicit and energetic: "Of course, we don't limit ourself simply to that prediction. We go further, and advise the workers to bear this in mind and prepare themselves not to permit the reactionary outlived minority to frustrate the will of the majority."

Then, why not raise the voice at this point and call upon the workers to organize their own violence against the reactionary violence? Immediately afterward, the perspective of struggle against the fascist bands is perfectly sketched by Cannon; but one notes that it deals with a non-existent perspective in an immediate form as if today against the false democracy it were unnecessary to organize the shock forces of the proletariat. It is something that is not clearly stated, it lends itself to equivocation and is reinforced by the final insistence in denying the existence (today) of any workers' guard. At any rate, the line that our comrades have followed in not taking advantage of the trial to indicate to the masses how and why they should exercise their own violence is incorrect. Instead we have the lamentable dialogue between Cannon and Goldman destined to pacify the easily frightened conscience of the jury about who initiates the violence.

In one manner or another it is supposed that we are going to conquer the majority for socialism. Then

> "Goldman: What is meant by the expression 'overthrow of the capitalist state'?
>
> "Cannon: That means to replace it by a Workers' and Farmers' Government; that is what we mean.
>
> "Goldman: What is meant by the expression 'destroy the machinery of the capitalist state'?
>
> "Cannon: By that we mean that *when* [underlined by me. G.M.] we set up the Workers' and Farmers' Government in this country, the functioning of this, its tasks, its whole nature, will be so profoundly and radically different from the foundations, tasks and nature of the bourgeois state that we will have to replace it all along the line."

All the revolutionary, violent process, the *civil war* that must precede the establishment of the Workers' and Farmers' Government and the proletarian state, is palmed away; I cannot find another word more euphemistic. Therefore, when a little bit later Cannon has to circumscribe himself, he gives a definition of the soviet, such as an abbreviated encyclopedia would give, hushing everything that deals with its function as an organism of struggle, in competition and opposition to the organisms of the bourgeois power.

What other thing can the Workers' and Farmers' Government be than the culmination of the struggle of the proletariat and farmers against the bourgeoisie? That struggle has to be pushed from now on, and beginning with the opening of the revolutionary crisis, it will develop "in crescendo," to the point at which the masses

will create soviets or councils that direct the general struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, foresee the necessities of that struggle, including the arms, and permit within its fold a liberty of ideological struggle so that the masses can elect those who best represent them. Only then, when the revolutionary tendency has acquired a majority of the soviets—not in the parliamentarian elections—the violent seizure of power will destroy the bourgeois state, leaving the soviets as the base of the proletarian state.

Cannon stated that the machine of the bourgeois state will be destroyed "when we set up the Workers' and Farmers' Government." But the possibility of such a government does not open until *after* we have destroyed that machine. Cannon knows this perfectly, and undoubtedly, proposes to act accordingly. But in that case, I insist, why lose the excellent and rare opportunity to give the workers a lesson, indicating to them without subterfuge the road to the struggle and power, accusing at the same time the bourgeoisie of a reactionary and pro-fascist course? The predictions about how the social dialectic is going to reinforce our positions, do not have any real value for the workers. The revolutionary process is seen here as the school books will describe it in 500 years. The workers today need an indication of the dynamics of the class struggle, the forms of organization, methods of struggle up to the civil war, slogans, and included there is a need for proud valour against the class enemy, something which has been rare in the trial. The general tone has been not to accuse but to apologize to a point that makes one feel embarrassed at times; not to indicate and propose actions and immediate means for the struggle against the bourgeoisie and against the war, but rather to dilute our ideas into humanitarianism and to veil their *active* value with predictions of knowledge as if it were not honorable to employ violence against the present corrupted bourgeois democracy.

Something completely demonstrative of the foregoing is that our comrades have cited as witnesses in their defense—Jefferson, Lincoln, the Bible, Lloyd George, MacDonald; but when Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and even Cannon appear, they are rejected as non-official mouthpieces of our organization. This attitude, not very valiant, cannot conquer much sympathy, or at least cannot conquer as much as the opposite attitude would conquer.

I know perfectly well that I am not teaching anything to anybody. What I have said is known better by the comrades to whom it refers. They will agree with me in relation to the principles re-

ferred to, except perhaps, in the problems of military training under trade union control, and sabotage—questions that it is urgent to clarify in the party and in the International. I find no more reason for their attitude in the trial than considerations that it would be a "useful maneuver." But it is precisely that I consider it a very grave error to substitute maneuvers for principles in moments so important for the political future of the party. I believe and propose as a general principle that in similar trials our responsible militants accept all responsibility for the practical action of our ideas. This is worth more than a light sentence at the price of a pretty and deceptive polish. I propose that this criticism be published in the internal bulletins of the International and of the S.W.P.

January 7, 1942

NOTE: This criticism has been written with extreme rush, in order not to lose an immediate opportunity to transmit it. I have not taken more than the paragraphs that first struck my eyes. Therefore, I reserve the possibility of amplifying it.

Political Principles and Propaganda Methods

By JAMES P. CANNON

1. Our Strategy in the Trial

In the Minneapolis "sedition" trial, as in the months-long trade union battle which preceded and led up to it, the American Trotskyists were put to the test and compelled to show what stuff they are made of. In both instances they conducted themselves in a manner befitting disciples of Trotsky and met the test in all respects.

In the fight with the trade union bureaucracy, which attracted national attention, it was clearly shown who the real leaders of militant labor, the real men of principle, really are. In the trial before the bourgeois court the party, by the conduct of all its members involved, earned the right to the confidence of the revolutionary workers. The two struggles, which in reality were two sides of one and the same struggle, marked a climactic point in the activity of the American movement which had developed in a restricted circle since its inception thirteen years before.

During that time the party, with some local exceptions, had gained the attention only of the vanguard of class conscious workers. At the trial we had the opportunity, for the first time, to speak to the masses—to the people of the United States. We seized upon the opportunity and made the most of it, and applied in practice without a serious fault the basic principles which had been assimilated in a long preparatory period. Since then the movement in the United States stands on higher ground.

A critical study and discussion of the trial cannot fail to be of the highest value to the Fourth International, especially to those sections which have yet to reach the turn in the road which leads from the propaganda circle to mass work. For our part, we welcome the discussion and will do our best to contribute something useful to it.

From the first moment after the indictment was brought against us in the Federal Court at Minneapolis last July we recog-

nized that the attack had two aspects, and we appraised each of them, we think, at their true significance. The prosecution was designed to outlaw the party and deprive it, perhaps for a long time, of the active services of a number of its most experienced leaders. At the same time it was obvious that the mass trial, properly handled on our part, could give us our first real opportunity to make the party and its principles known to wide circles of workers and to gain a sympathetic hearing from them.

Our strategy, from the beginning, took both sides of the problem into account. Naturally, we decided to utilize to the fullest extent each and every legal protection, technicality and resource available to us under the law and the constitution. A party leadership hesitating or neglecting to do this would frivolously jeopardize the legality of the party and show a very wasteful attitude indeed toward party cadres. Such a leadership would deserve only to be driven out with sticks and stones.

On the other hand, we planned to conduct our defense in court not as a "criminal" defense but as a propaganda offensive. Without foolishly disregarding or provoking the jury or needlessly helping the prosecutor, it was our aim to use the courtroom as a forum to popularize the principles of our movement. We saw in this second proposition our main duty and opportunity and never for a moment intended to let purely legalistic considerations take precedence over it. Therefore we sternly rejected the repeated advice of attorneys—some who assisted Goldman in the trial of the case as well as others who were consulted about participation—to eliminate or play down our "propaganda" program and leave the defense policy to the lawyers.

From the rather unhappy experiences of past trials of militants in the courts of the United States we knew what following such advice would mean: Deny or keep quiet about the revolutionary principles of the movement; permit the lawyers to disavow and ridicule the defendants, and pass them off as somewhat foolish people belonging to a party which is not to be taken seriously; and depend on spread-eagle speeches of the lawyers to the jury to get the defendants off some way or other.

The October Plenum-Conference of the party unanimously endorsed the National Committee's recommendations on courtroom policy. The resolution of the conference laid down the policy as follows:

> **"The policy of the party in defending itself in court, obligatory for all party members under indictment, can only be one that is**

worthy of our movement and our tradition; no attempt to water down or evade our revolutionary doctrine, but, on the contrary, to defend it militantly. At the same time we maintain that we have a legal right under the Bill of Rights to propagate our principles."

That is the policy we took with us to the trial. It guided us at every step in the proceedings. And we think it can be safely said that the policy has been amply vindicated by the results. Our principles were widely popularized, a hundred or a thousand times better than ever before, and our conduct before the court has met with approval and sympathy from the militant workers who followed the trial and read the testimony.

The trial was by far our greatest propaganda success. Moreover, even those workers who disagree with our program, have approved and applauded our conduct in court as worthy of people who take their principles seriously. Such is the testimony of all comrades who have reported on the reaction of the workers to the trial. On a recent tour across the country from branch to branch of the party we heard the same unvarying report everywhere.

Naturally, our work in the trial was not perfect; we did only the best we could within the narrow limits prescribed by the court. More qualified people can quite easily point out things here and there which might have been done more cleverly. We can readily acknowledge the justice of such criticisms without thereby admitting any guilt on our part, for socialism does not require that all be endowed with equal talent, but only that each give according to his ability. It is a different matter when Comrade Munis—and other critics of our policy—accuse us of misunderstanding our task and departing from Marxist principles in the trial. To them we are obliged to say firmly: No, the misunderstanding is all on your side. The correct understanding of our task in the courtroom and the sanction of the Marxist authorities, are on our side.

In undertaking to prove this contention we must begin with a brief analysis of a point overlooked by Munis as well as by the others: the social environment in which the trial was conducted. Our critics nowhere, by so much as a single word, refer to the objective situation in the United States; the political forms still prevailing here; the degree of political maturity—more properly, immaturity—of the American proletariat; the relation of class forces; the size and status of the party—in short, to the specific peculiarities of our problem which should determine our method of approach to workers hearing us for the first time from the sounding board of the trial.

Our critics talk in terms of trials in general and principles in general, which, it would appear, are always to be formulated and explained to the workers in general in precisely the same way. We, on the contrary, dealt with a specific trial and attempted to explain ourselves to the workers as they are in the United States in the year 1941. Thus we clash with our critics at the very point of departure—the analysis, the method. Our answer to their criticism must take the same form.

We shall begin by first setting forth the concrete environmental circumstances in which our party functioned in the United States at the time of the trial and the specific tasks and propaganda techniques which, in our opinion, were thereby imposed. Then we shall proceed to submit our position, as well as that of our critics, to the criterion which must be decisive for all of us: the expressions of the Marxist teachers on the application of the points of principle under discussion.*

2. The Setting of the Trial

The United States, where the trial took place, is by far the richest of all the capitalist nations, and because of that has been one of the few such nations still able to afford the luxury of bourgois democratic forms in the epoch of the decline and decay of capitalism. Trade unions, which have been destroyed in one European country after another in the past decade, have flourished and more than doubled their membership in the United States in the same period—partly with governmental encouragement. Free speech and free press, obliterated or reduced to travesty in other lands, have been virtually unrestricted here. Elections have been held under the normal bourgeois democratic forms, traditional in America for more than a century, and the great mass of the workers have freely participated in them. The riches and favored position of bourgeois America have also enabled it, despite the devastating crisis, to maintain living standards of the workers far above those of any other country.

These objective circumstances have unfailingly affected both the mentality of the workers and the fortunes of the revolutionary political movement. The revolutionary implications of the shaken economy, propped up for the time being by the armaments boom, are as yet but slightly reflected in the consciousness of the workers. In their outlook they are far from revolutionary. "Politics" to

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* All quotations cited in this document are from the English texts.

them means voting for one or another of the big capitalist parties. The simple fact that the organized labor movement has not yet resorted to independent political action, even on a reformist basis, but remains in its political activity an appendage of the Roosevelt political party—this simple fact in itself shows conclusively that the American workers have not yet begun to translate their fierce militancy on the field of economic strikes, directed at individual employers, into terms of independent politics directed against the employers as a class. As for the Marxist party, with its program of the revolutionary transformation of society, it has been able in such an environment to attract the attention of only a few thousands to its message and to recruit into its ranks a still smaller number of the most advanced and class conscious militants.

The forty million American workers, casting an almost solid labor vote for Roosevelt, remain in the first primitive stages of class political development; they are soaked through and through with bourgeois democratic illusions; they are discontented to a certain extent and partly union conscious but not class conscious; they have a fetishistic respect for the Federal government as the government of all the people and hope to better conditions for themselves by voting for "friendly" bourgeois politicians; they hate and fear fascism which they identify with Hitler; they understand socialism and communism only in the version disseminated by the bourgeois press, and are either hostile or indifferent to it; the real meaning of socialism, the revolutionary Marxist meaning, is unknown to the great majority.

Such were the general external factors, and such was the mentality of the American workers, confronting our party at the time of the Minneapolis trial, October, November, and December 1941. What specific tasks, what propaganda techniques were imposed thereby? It seems to us that the answers are obvious. The task was to *get a hearing* for our ideas from the forum of the trial. These ideas had to be simplified as much as possible, *made plausible* to the workers and illustrated whenever possible by familiar examples from American history. We had to address ourselves to the workers not in general, not as an abstraction, but as they exist in reality in the United States in the year 1941. We had to recognize that the forms of democracy and the legality of the party greatly facilitate this propaganda work and must not be lightly disregarded. It was not our duty to facilitate the work of the prosecuting attorney but to make it more difficult, insofar as this could be done without renouncing any principle. Such are the considera-

tions which guided us in our work at the trial.

Our critics do not refer to them; evidently they did not even think of them. Our method is a far different method than the simple repetition of formulas about "action" which requires nothing but a good memory. More precisely, it is the Marxist method of applying principles to concrete circumstances in order to popularize a party and create a movement which can lead to action in the real life of the class struggle, not on the printed page where the "action" of sectarian formalists always begins and ends.

The accomplishment of our main task—to use the courtroom as a forum from which to speak to those American workers, as they are, who might hear us for the first time—required, in our judgment, not a call to arms but patient, school-room *explanations* of our doctrines and ourselves, and a quiet tone. Therefore we adapted, not our principles but our propaganda technique to the occasion as we understood it. The style of propaganda and the tone which we employed are not recommended as a universally applicable formula. Our propaganda style and tone were simply designed to serve the requirements, in the given situation, of a small minority Marxist party in a big country of democratic capitalism in the general historic circumstances above described.

Comrade Munis accuses us of popularizing our propaganda and defending ourselves (and the party's legality) at the expense of principle. Our statements at the trial are held to be "decidedly opportunist"; to "border on a renunciation of principles." Following such and similar assertions we are informed that "it is a very grave error to substitute maneuvers for principles." This maxim—not entirely original in our movement—can be accepted with these provisos: that the maxim be understood; that a distinction be made between "maneuvers" which serve principle and those which contradict it; and that it be applied to actual and not imaginary sacrifices of principle. This is the gist of the whole matter. The Marxist teachers did not change their principles, but in explaining them they frequently changed their manner and tone and points of emphasis to suit occasion. We had a right and a duty to do the same. An examination of our testimony from this standpoint will bring different conclusions from those which our critics have so hastily drawn.

3. Violence and the Transition to Socialism

We were charged in the first count of the indictment with "conspiracy to overthrow the government by force and violence"

in violation of the statute of 1861 which was originally directed against the slave-holders' rebellion. In the second count we were charged, among other things, with "conspiracy to *advocate* the overthrow of the government by force and violence" in violation of the Smith Act of 1940.

In our defense we flatly denied we had either "conspired" or "advocated" violence, and by that we did not in the least intend to deny or repudiate any principle of Marxism. We claimed the right to *explain* our position. We testified that we prefer a peaceful social transformation; that the bourgeoisie takes the initiative in violence and will not permit a peaceful change; that we advise the workers to bear this in mind and prepare to *defend themselves* against the violence of the outlived reactionary minority class.

This formula—which is 100 per cent correct in the essence of the matter and unassailable from the standpoint of Marxist authority—did not coincide with the contentions of the prosecuting attorney, nor help him to prove his case against us. But that was not our duty. From entirely opposite considerations our exposition does not meet with the approval of Comrade Munis nor coincide with his conceptions. That is not our duty either, because his conceptions are arbitrary and formalistic—and therefore false.

The prosecutor wanted to limit the whole discussion of socialism to the single question of "force and violence." We on the other hand—for the first time in an American courtroom—tried to make an exposition, if only a brief and sketchy one, of the whole range of Marxist theory, as in an elementary study class for uninitiated workers, to the extent that this was possible within the narrow frame-work prescribed by the court's rules and the repeated objections of the prosecutor, assigning the question of force in the social revolution to its proper proportionate place and putting the responsibility for it where it properly belongs—on the shoulders of the outlived class.

We carried out this task to the best of our ability at the trial. Of course, thesis precision and full-rounded explanation are hardly possible in a rapid-fire impromptu dialogue, with answers compressed to extreme brevity by time limitations, prosecutor's objections and court rulings. We cannot claim such precision and amplitude for our answers, and reasonable people should not demand it of us. Even Trotsky admitted the possibility of flaws in testimony which he gave in somewhat similar but more favorable circumstances before the Dewey Commission. In reply to Ver, who

had criticized one of his answers in the published record of the Inquiry, he said:

> "It is possible that there is some lack of precision in the stenographic report. It is not a matter here either of a programmatic text well thought out, or even of an article, but of a stenographic report drawn up by the Commission. You know that I did not even have the chance to revise it myself. Some misunderstandings, imprecisions may have crept in. Enemies can make use of them, but serious comrades must grasp the question in its totality." (Internal Bulletin of the Socialist Workers Party, No. 3.)

Here it may be in order to explain that American court procedure, unlike that of many other countries, does not permit defendants to introduce worked-out statements and "declarations." They must answer orally, they must make their answers short and are liable to be cut off at any time by the objection of the prosecutor or the ruling of the judge. In such an atmosphere a witness is under constant pressure to condense his answers and to omit explanations which may be necessary for full clarity but which are not interesting to the court.

We mention these factors only to ask the same kind of reasonable allowance for short-comings which Trotsky asked, not to disavow anything we said. By and large, making all due acknowledgment of imperfections, omissions and inadequacies in the oral testimony, we accomplished our propagandistic aims at the trial, and we stand on the record. The court record, published in thousands of copies, became and will remain our most effective propaganda document. It is an honest and forthright revolutionary record. Nobody will succeed in discrediting it.

What did we say about violence in the transformation of society from capitalism to socialism? This is what we said:

1) The Marxists prefer a peaceful transition. "The position of the Marxists is that the most economical and preferable, the most desirable method of social transformation, by all means, is to have it done peacefully." (From the court record, Socialism on Trial, page 34.)
2) "It is the opinion of all Marxists that it will be accompanied by violence." (Socialism on Trial, page 33.)
3) That opinion "is based, like all Marxist doctrine, on a study of history, the historical experiences of mankind in the numerous changes of society from one form to another, the revolutions which accompanied it, and the resistance which the outlived classes invariably put up against the new order. Their attempt to defend themselves against the new order, or to suppress by violence the movement for the new order, has resulted in every

important social transformation up to now being accompanied by violence." (Socialism on Trial, page 33.)

4) The ruling class always initiates the violence, "always the ruling class; always the outlived class that doesn't want to leave the stage when the time has come. They want to hang onto their privileges, to reinforce them by violent measures, against the rising majority *and they run up against the mass violence of the new class*, which history has ordained shall come to power." (Socialism on Trial, page 33.)

5) That is our prediction. But "of course, we don't limit ourselves simply to that prediction. We go further, and advise the workers to bear this in mind and prepare themselves not to permit the reactionary outlived minority to frustrate the will of the majority." (Socialism on Trial, page 35.)

"QUESTION: What role does the rise and existence of fascism play with reference to the possibility of violence?

"ANSWER: Well, that is really the nub of the whole question, because the reactionary violence of the capitalist class, expressed through fascism, is invoked against the workers. Long before the revolutionary movement of the workers gains the majority, fascist gangs are organized and subsidized by millions in funds from the biggest industrialists and financiers, as the example of Germany showed—and these fascist gangs undertake to break up the labor movement by force, raid the halls, assassinate the leaders, break up the meetings, burn the printing plants, and destroy the possibility of functioning long before the labor movement has taken the road of revolution.

"I say that is the nub of the whole question of violence. If the workers don't recognize that, and do not begin to defend themselves against the fascists, they will never be given the possibility of voting on the question of revolution. They will face the fate of the German and Italian proletariat and they will be in the chains of fascist slavery before they have a chance of any kind of a fair vote on whether they want Socialism or not.

"It is a life and death question for the workers that they organize themselves to prevent fascism, the fascist gangs, from breaking up the workers' organizations, and not to wait until it is too late. That is the program of our party." (Socialism on Trial, page 35.)

That is all any Marxist really needs to say on the question of violence in a capitalist court or at a propaganda meeting for workers at the present time in the United States. It tells the truth, conforms to principle, and protects the legal position of the party. The workers will understand it too. To quote Shakespeare's Mer-

cutio: "'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve."

Comrade Munis, however, is not satisfied with our "lamentable dialogue," allegedly "destined to pacify the easily frightened conscience of the jury about who initiates the violence." The above quoted answer advising the workers to "bear in mind" the violent course of the ruling class and "prepare themselves," is not "sufficiently explicit and energetic." (He underestimates the acuteness of the workers.) "Why not," says Comrade Munis, "raise the voice at this point and call upon the workers to organize their own violence against the reactionary violence?"

Why not? Because it was not necessary or advisable either to raise the voice or issue any call for action at this time. We were talking, in the first place, for the benefit of the uninitiated worker who would be reading the testimony in the paper or in pamphlet form. We needed a calm and careful exposition in order to get his attention. This worker is by no means waiting impatiently for our call to violent action. Quite the contrary, he ardently believes in the so-called democracy, and the first question he will ask, if he becomes interested in socialism, is: "Why can't we get it peacefully, by the ballot?" It is necessary to *patiently explain* to him that, while we would prefer it that way, the bosses will not permit it, will resort to violence against the majority, and that the workers must *defend* themselves and their *right* to change things. Our *defensive* formula is not only legally unassailable, "for the jury," as our critics contemptuously remark — as though 28 indicted people in their right senses, and a party threatened with illegality, can afford the luxury of disregarding the jury. It is also the best formula for effective propaganda.

These defensive formulas are not our invention; they come directly from the great Marxists who did not believe in the good will of the class enemies and knew how to organize action, that is, *mass* action, against them. And these same teachers and organizers of mass actions likewise never failed to appreciate the value of democratic forms and party legality and to hang onto them and utilize them to the fullest extent possible. Our teachers did not shrink from force; they never deluded the workers with the promise of a peaceful, democratic transformation of society. But they didn't speak of violence always in the same way, in the same tone and with the same emphasis. Always, in circumstances in any way comparable to ours, they have spoken as we spoke at the trial. Proof of this is abundant and overwhelming.

The *first* formulated statement of the communist position on the question of violence and the transition to socialism appears in Engels' "Principles of Communism," a "catechism" written in 1847 which is generally regarded as the first draft of the Communist Manifesto. Engels wrote:

> **"Question Sixteen: Will it be possible to bring about the abolition of private property by peaceful methods?**
>
> **"Answer: It is a thing greatly to be desired, and communists would be the last persons in the world to stand in the way of a peaceful solution." (International Publishers edition of The Communist Manifesto, Marxist Library, Volume III, page 330.)**

Engels didn't promise such a solution and he didn't forget to add: "Should the oppressed proletariat at long last be goaded into a revolution, the communists will rally to the cause of the workers and be just as prompt to act as they are now to speak."

The *last* statement of Marxist authority, expressed by Trotsky 93 years later, follows the same pattern as that of Engels. In the summer of 1940 the Dies Committee conducted a raid on a comrade's house in Texas and carried off some party literature. Anticipating an attack on the legal position of the Socialist Workers Party, Comrade Trotsky wrote us a letter, advising us how to formulate our propaganda and defend ourselves "from the legal point of view" and warning us not "to furnish any pretext for persecutions." This letter, as though written to answer in advance the ultra-radical quibbling about the Minneapolis trial, was printed in *Fourth International,* October 1940, page 126. Trotsky wrote:

> **"The Texas story is very important. The attitude of the people involved can become decisive from the legal point of view.**
>
> **"We, of course, cannot imitate the Stalinists who proclaim their absolute devotion to the bourgeois democracy. However, we do not wish to furnish any pretext for persecutions.**
>
> **"In this case, as in any others, we should speak the truth as it is; namely, the best, the most economical and favorable method for the masses would be to achieve the transformation of this society by democratic means. The democracy is also necessary for the organization and education of the masses. That is why we are always ready to defend the democratic rights of the people by our own means. However, we know on the basis of tremendous historical experience that the 60 Families will never permit the democratic realization of socialist principles. At a given moment the 60 Families will inevitably overthrow, or try to overthrow, the democratic institutions and replace them by a reactionary dictatorship. This is what happened in Italy, in Germany and in the last days in France—not to mention the lesser countries. We say in advance that we are**

ready to reject such an attempt with arms in hands, and crush the fascist dictatorship by a proletarian dictatorship.

"This position corresponds to the historical reality and is juridically unattackable."

These words, written by the founder of our movement in the last month of his life, were not chance remarks thrown off at random. They were written in direct connection with an expected prosecution, and he specifically warned us that "the attitude of the people involved can become decisive from the legal point of view." He knew the value of party legality and did not want us to jeopardize it needlessly. Do not, he said almost in so many words, accept the prosecuting attorney's accusation that we advocate conspiratorial violence by a minority. Present the question in a way which "corresponds to historical reality" and which is, at the same time, by its defensive formulation, "juridically unattackable."

That letter was the guiding line for our policy at the trial. We took the words of Trotsky as Marxist authority. For us there is no higher. Our movement, the movement of the Fourth International which stems directly from the struggle of the Trotskyist Opposition in Russia since 1923, embodies in its doctrine and its tradition the whole of Marxism and the whole of the precepts and example of Lenin, developed and applied to conditions of the post-Lenin period. We know it is the fashion in late years for some people to contrast Lenin to Trotsky and to refer to Lenin as the primary authority. The Oehlerites in the United States, for example, advertise themselves as "Leninists" of this type; and even Shachtman, dabbling with radicalism for a season, tried to invoke Lenin against the military policy elaborated by Trotsky. There is no more truth or merit in this burlesque than there was in the attempt of the opportunists during the first World War to appeal to Marx and Engels against Lenin.

All four of the great Marxist authorities — Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky — are united in an uninterrupted continuity of experience reflected in Marxist thought. For us, Lenin is Marx in the epoch of the first World War and the October revolution. Trotsky is Lenin in the epoch of Stalinist degeneration and the struggle against it, the epoch of fascism and the second World War and the preparation of the new rise of the international revolution of the proletariat.

These "Leninists" — God save the mark! — are fond of repeating isolated quotations from Lenin as fixed and final answers

to current problems which arise ever new and in infinite variations of circumstance. A greater distortion of Leninism — which is a method, not a collection of bible texts — can hardly be imagined. They repeat the words of Lenin on this or that occasion without understanding that Lenin did not always repeat himself and had nothing but contempt for such thought-saving substitutes for living Marxism. An instructive sample of this practice is the attempt of Munis to picture us as "rejecting" Lenin because we took the liberty of saying a sentence he wrote about insurrection in Czarist Russia in 1906 is not applicable for our propaganda in the United States in 1941.

Our frank avowal before the court that we are disciples of Lenin is not enough to satisfy Munis. Our statements that in our movement "he holds a position of esteem on a level with Marx"; that "the basic ideas and doctrines, practiced, promulgated and carried out by Lenin, are supported by our movement" — these declarations, in the judgment of our critic, are not sufficient to constitute an acceptance of Lenin. He seems to think it is necessary to repeat and accept as gospel every word Lenin said on every occasion regardless of what Lenin himself may have said on the same subject on other occasions.

He cites the question of Mr. Schweinhaut, the prosecutor, reading a sentence from Lenin's "The Revolution of 1905": "'It is our duty in time of an uprising to exterminate ruthlessly all the chiefs of the civil and military authorities.' You disagree with that?"

Naturally we denied that this is a statement of party policy here and now, modifying it as follows: "We do not agree with the extermination of anybody unless it is in case of an actual armed struggle when the rules of war apply." In reality this was saying, out of deference to Lenin, a great deal more than needs to be said on the subject of extermination before a capitalist court or in a propaganda speech in the United States at the present time. But this does not satisfy Munis. Why, he demands, say "anybody" instead of "the civil and military chiefs"? "Why reject the paragraph?" We must repeat Lenin word for word!

Why must we? *Lenin didn't repeat himself word for word.* Far from it, he changed and modified such formulas to suit occasion without ceremony. In fact, on the very eve of the October revolution, he changed this particular formula so radically as to give it a quite different, "milder" meaning in order better to serve his political aims at the time. In his letter to the Central Committee,

dated September 26-27, 1917, *a letter calling for the organization of the insurrection,* he omits any reference to "extermination" and simply says: "We must *arrest* the general staff and the government." (Lenin: Selected Works — Vol. VI, Page 223. Our emphasis.)

On still another occasion, September 14-16, 1917, offering a "compromise" to the S.R. and Menshevik majority, Lenin proposed that they form an S.R.-Menshevik government responsible only to the Soviets. Such a government, he said, "in all probability could secure a peaceful *forward* march of the whole Russian Revolution." Should the proposition be accepted by the S.R.'s and Mensheviks, then:

> **"No other condition would, I think, be advanced by the Bolsheviks, who would be confident that really full freedom of propaganda and the immediate realization of a new democracy in the composition of the Soviets (new elections to them) and in their functioning would in themselves secure a peaceful forward movement of the revolution, *a peaceful outcome* of the party strike within the Soviets.**
>
> **"Perhaps this is *already* impossible? Perhaps. But if there is even one chance in a hundred, the attempt at realizing such a possibility would still be worth while." (Lenin: Collected Works, Vol. XXI, Book I, Pages 153-154.)**

In this case Lenin asked nothing more of the "civil and military chiefs" among the "ruling" petty-bourgeois democratic parties than that they take power and assure "really full freedom of propaganda." Returning to this question again on October 9, 1917, he wrote:

> **"Our business is to help do everything possible to secure the 'last' chance for a peaceful development of the revolution, to help this by presenting our programme, by making clear its general, national character, its absolute harmony with the interests and demands of an enormous majority of the population." (Lenin: Collected Works —Vol. XXI, Book I, Page 257.)**

Thus, Lenin proposed to fight "the civil and military chiefs" in three different ways, according to the circumstances, on three different occasions — by "extermination," by "arrest," and by "peaceful propaganda." All were equally revolutionary. The occasions and the circumstances in each case were different. Lenin took such variations into account and changed his proposals accordingly. He never made a strait-jacket out of his tactical formulas. Neither should we — if we want to be genuine Leninists.

That "force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with

the new" — this is an axiom known to every student of Marxism. It is wrong to entertain or disseminate illusions on this score, and we did not do so at the trial. But it is a great mistake to conclude from this that violence and the talk about violence serve the revolutionary vanguard advantageously at all times and under all conditions. On the contrary, peaceful conditions and democratic legal forms are most useful in the period when the party is still gathering its forces and when the main strength and resources, including the resources of violence, are on the other side. Lenin remarked that Engels was "most correct" in "advocating the use of bourgeois legality" and saying to the German ruling class in 1891: "Be the first to shoot, Messrs. Bourgeois!"

Our party which must still strive to *get a hearing* from the as yet indifferent working class of America has the least reason of all to emphasize or to "advocate" violence. This attitude is determined by the present stage of class development and the relation of forces in the United States; not, as Munis so generously assumes, by our exaggerated concern for a "light sentence." As a matter of fact the question of violence was given ten times more proportionate mention in our testimony at the trial than it has been given in the propaganda columns of our press during the past ten years, including the voluminous contributions of Comrade Trotsky.

Expressing disdain for our repeated painstaking explanations "about who initiates the violence," and our "general tone" which, he says, "makes one feel embarrassed at times," Munis offers us "proud valor" as a substitute. Had we been gifted with this rare attribute we should have said, according to Munis: "The workers and farmers should respond to the daily violence of the poor masses. We do not predict, but rather we assure, we ask, we advocate temporary violence of the majority against the permanent organic violence of the reactionary minority."

We don't know much about "proud valor" and had no need of it; we did not appear at the trials as posturing actors but only as party militants with a practical political task to carry out. Naturally, it is a good thing for a revolutionary militant to have ordinary human courage enough to take those risks which are implicit in the struggle against capitalism. And we can add: He should also have enough prudence to avoid unnecessary sacrifices. The lack of either of these qualities can be a serious personal deficiency. But the possession of both, and in good working order at that, still does not suffice to answer the most important question

confronting us at the trial; namely, what formulations, what tone, what emphasis on the question of violence could best serve our cause under the given conditions? The answer to the question must be political, not theatrical.

Lenin unquestionably burned with indignation and hatred for the oppressions of the people and knew about the violence of all kinds that is inseparable from a regime of class domination. Also, while it is quite impossible to speak of "valor" to say nothing of "proud valor," in connection with the unpretentious and matter-of-fact Lenin — such knightly grandiloquence would fit him as oddly as a silk hat — there is evidence that he had nerve enough to fill his post. Lenin was the most stiff-necked rebel in history. But his approach to the question of violence, as to every other question, was determined by political considerations. He did not by any means employ one universal formula and one kind of emphasis such as Munis prescribes for us. Indeed, he was far less "radical" in his formulations for the propaganda of the Bolshevik party in the months, and even the weeks, directly preceding the victory than is Munis in his demands on our party which at the time of the trial could only be described properly as a small and isolated propaganda group.

It is most revealing to read how the great master of revolutionary strategy, returning to Russia after the March revolution, developed the work of *mobilizing the masses* around the Bolshevik party *by means of propaganda.* The Bolshevik party grew by leaps and bounds, but nevertheless remained a minority for many months. It should be instructive to any "violence" fanatic to see how Lenin, under these conditions, persistently tried *to shove the question of violence into the background* and to ward off a premature test of strength. Even as late as October 9, as we have seen, he was offering "to help do everything possible to secure the 'last' chance for a *peaceful development* of the revolution." When he finally called for action it was for *mass* action and there was no theatrical bluster about it. The Bolshevik party, thanks to its preliminary propaganda work, had the mass force to carry the action through to victory.

On April 25 he protested in *Pravda* against "dark insinuations" of "Minister Nekrasov" about "the preaching of violence" by the Bolsheviks:

> **"Mr. Minister, worthy member of the 'People's Freedom Party,' you are lying. It is Mr. Guchkov who preaches violence when he threatens to punish the soldiers for removing the authorities. It**

is the *Russkaia Volia*, the pogrom newspaper of the pogrom 'republicans' and friendly to you that preaches violence.

"The *Pravda* and its followers do not preach violence. On the contrary, they declare most clearly, precisely, and definitely, that our main work should at present be concentrated on *explaining* to the proletarian masses their proletarian problems, as distinguished from the problems of the petty bourgeoisie which has succumbed to chauvinist poison." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Page 171.)

On May 4 the Central Committee of the party adopted a resolution written by Lenin. The aim of this resolution was to restrain the Petrograd local leadership which was running ahead of events; to put the *"responsibility"* for any violence on the "Provisional Government and its supporters"; and to accuse the "capitalist minority" of reluctance to submit to the will of the majority." Here are the two paragraphs from the resolution:

"1. Party agitators and speakers must refute the despicable lies of the capitalist papers and of the papers supporting the capitalists to the effect that we threaten with *civil war*. This is a despicable lie, for at the present moment, when the capitalists and their government cannot and dare not use violence against the masses, when the mass of soldiers and workers freely expresses its will, freely elects and replaces all public officers, — at such a moment any thought of civil war is naive, senseless, monstrous; at such a moment there must be full compliance with the will of the majority of the population and free criticism of this will by the dissatisfied minority; should violence be resorted to, the responsibility will fall on the Provisional Government and its supporters.

"2. The government of the capitalists and its newspapers, by their noisy denunciation of the alleged civil war, are only trying to conceal the reluctance of the capitalists, who admittedly constitute an insignificant minority of the people, to submit to the will of the majority." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Page 245.)

Doesn't this sound surprisingly like "the lamentable dialogue about who initiates the violence" concerning which Munis so haughtily protests? Indeed, the similarity is not accidental. Our formulations did not fall from the sky. We had taken the trouble to read Lenin, not in order to memorize his words but to learn the essence of his methods of approaching and mobilizing the masses while the Bolsheviks remained in the minority.

On May 5 the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party, fighting against enemy provocations on the one side and revolutionary

impatience in the party ranks on the other, adopted another resolution on Lenin's motion. It is worth reading over ten times by any comrade who may be impressed by light-minded talk about "action" by a party which lacks the necessary mass support for action. The resolution says:

> "The slogan, 'Down with the Provisional Government,' is at the present moment not sound, because such a slogan, unless there is a solid (i.e., a class conscious and organized) majority of the people on the side of the revolutionary proletariat, is either a mere phrase, or, objectively, reduces itself to encouraging efforts of an adventurous nature." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Page 254.)

If these ideas are correct, and we believe they are, then it is certainly reasonable to conclude that the Socialist Workers Party in the United States has some long, hard days of propaganda work, of *patiently explaining,* ahead of it. By such means it must secure a mass support before it can afford the luxury of much talk about action. Lenin drew these conclusions for the Bolshevik party, and laid down precise instructions accordingly, only six months before it was to become the majority. The same resolution says in another paragraph:

> "The slogans of the moment are: (1) ***Elucidation*** of the proletarian policy and proletarian method of terminating the war; (2) ***criticism*** of the petty-bourgeois policy of confidence in and agreement with the capitalist government; (3) ***propaganda and agitation*** from group to group, within each regiment, in each factory, particularly amongst the most backward masses, servants, unskilled labourers, etc., for it is mostly on them that the bourgeoisie tried to base itself during the days of the crisis; (4) ***organisation, organisation and once more organisation*** of the proletariat: in each factory, in each district, in each block." (Lenin: Collected works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Page 255. Our emphasis.)

On May 6, still hammering at irresponsible violence-mongers, the greatest leader of revolutionary action, who believed in first *"explaining"* and *"convincing"* and *"winning over the majority,"* wrote:

> "Crises cannot be overcome by the violence of individuals against other individuals, by partial risings of small groups of armed people, by Blanquist attempts to 'seize power,' to 'arrest' the Provisional Government, etc.
>
> "The slogan of the day is: Explain more carefully, more clearly, more broadly the proletarian policy, the proletarian method of terminating the war." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Pape 259.)

Marxism, without a doubt, is the doctrine of revolutionary ac-

tion. But is has nothing in common with "violence of individuals," "partial risings of small groups," or any other form of "action" wherein individuals or minorities attempt to substitute themselves for the masses. In other words Marxism is not anarchism or Blanquism; it wages irreconcilable war against such tendencies. The revolutionary action which Marxism contemplates is the action of the masses, of the proletarian majority, led by the vanguard party. But this action, and the party's leading role in it must be, and can only be, *prepared by propaganda.* That is the central lesson of the development of the Bolshevik party after the March revolution and the eventual transformation of its slogans from propaganda to action. That was Lenin's method. It was less romantic than that of impatient people who dream of short cuts and miracles to be evoked by the magic word "action." But, in compensation, Lenin's method led to a mighty and victorious mass action in the end.

A party which lacks a mass base, which has yet to become widely known to the workers, must approach them along the lines of propaganda, of patient explanations, and pay no attention to impatient demands for "action" which it is unable to organize and for exaggerated emphasis on "violence" which, in the given conditions, can only react to its disadvantage. When one considers how persistently careful and even *cautious,* was Lenin's party to avoid provocation and cling to its formula of *peaceful propaganda* while it remained a minority, the merest suggestion that our party, at the present time, with its present strength, take a "bolder" course appears utterly fantastic, like a nightmare separated from living reality. Lenin wrote:

> **"The government would like to see us make the first reckless step towards decisive action, as this would be to its advantage. It is exasperated because our party has advanced the slogan of peaceful demonstration. We must not cede one iota of our principles to the watchfully waiting petty bourgeoisie. The proletarian party would be guilty of the most grievous error if it shaped its policy on the basis of subjective desires where organisation is required. We cannot assert that the majority is with us; in this case our motto should be: caution, caution, caution." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XX, Book 1, Page 279.)**

From the foregoing it should be clear that our disavowal of "responsibility" for violence in the testimony before the court at Minneapolis was not a special device invented by us "to reconcile the jury," as has been alleged; our formulation of the question, taken from Lenin, was designed to serve the political aims of our movement in the given situation. We did not, and had no need to,

disregard legality and "advocate" violence as charged in the indictment.

But neither did we represent ourselves as pacifists or sow pacifist illusions. Far from it. We elucidated the question of violence and the socialist transformation of society in the same way that our great teachers, who organized a revolution, elucidated it. More than that, we gave a sufficiently frank and precise justification of the defensive violence of the workers in the daily class struggle this side of the revolution. The court record bulges with proof that we had indeed advocated the organization of Workers Defense Guards. The testimony goes further—and this is a not unimportant detail — and reveals that we translated the word into deed and took a hand in the actual organization and activities of Defense Guards and picket squads when concrete circumstance made such actions possible and feasible.

We are not pacifists. The world knows, and the prosecutor in our trial had no difficulty in proving once again, that the great Minneapolis strikes, led by the Trotskyists, were not free from violence and that the workers were not the only victims. We did not disavow the record or apologize for it. When the prosecutor, referring to one of the strike battles in which the workers came out victorious, demanded: "Is that Trotskyism demonstrating itself?" he received a forthright answer. The court record states:

"A: Well, I can give you my own opinion, that I am mighty proud of the fact that Trotskyism had some part in influencing the workers to protect themselves against that sort of violence.

"Q: Well, what kind of violence do you mean?

"A: This was what the deputies were organized for, to drive the workers off the street. They got a dose of their own medicine. I think the workers have a right to defend themselves. If that is treason, you can make the most of it." (Socialism on Trial, Page 113.)

With this testimony we said all that needs to be said on the question of violence in the daily class struggle, as in the previously quoted testimony we said enough about violence and the transition to socialism. If this method of presentation did not help the prosecutor, we can say again: That was not our duty. If it is objected that even in this example of the Minneapolis strike, dealing with an indubitable case of working-class violence, we insisted on its *defensive* nature, we can only reply: In real life the difference between careful defensive formulation and light-minded "calls for action" is usually, in the end result, the difference between real action and mere talk about it.

4. Is It Correct to Say We Prefer a Peaceful Transition?

Our repeated insistence at the trial that we *prefer* a peaceful transition to socialism, and that we resort to violence only as a defensive measure, brings objection and ridicule from our critic. "Why not," says Munis — "why not ask forgiveness, besides, for seeing ourselves painfully obliged to employ violence against the bourgeoisie?" It is possible that others may regard our formulation as lacking in aggressiveness and militancy but, being more indulgent than Munis, pass it off as a legal euphemism, justifiable under the circumstances. To be sure, our formulation helped our position from a legal standpoint and we did not hesitate to emphasize it in this respect. Also, in our opinion, the declaration that we, the Trotskyists, prefer a peaceful change of society, is a good propaganda approach to the democratic-minded American workers. These two considerations are very important, but we are quite ready to agree that they would not justify the use of a false or hypocritical statement, or a statement contradicting principle.

We were guilty of no such dereliction. Our formula in this case also is the formula of the Marxist teachers. They not only insisted on the *desirability* of a peaceful change of society, but in certain exceptional circumstances, considered such a peaceful revolution possible. We, on our part, rejected any such prospect in the United States, but at the same time declared our preference for it and accused the ruling bourgeois as the instigators of violence. In this we were completely loyal to Marxist doctrine and tradition. On the witness stand at Minneapolis we mentioned the opinion of Marx and Engels in regard to England in the 19th century. Here is the exact quotation from Engels:

> **"Surely, at such a moment, the voice ought to be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a life-long study of the economic history and condition of England, and whom that study led to the conclusion that, at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means. He certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling classes to submit, without a 'pro-slavery rebellion,' to this peaceful and legal revolution." (Engels: Preface to Marx's Capital, Vol. I — Kerr Edition, Page 32.)**

We should have added that the conditions of England in Marx's time exist no more and therewith his calculation is out of

date and no longer applicable. At any rate, we made this clear with regard to the United States.

In "Terrorism and Communism," a book aimed from beginning to end at the bourgeois-democratic fetishism of Kautsky, Trotsky defended the violence of the proletarian revolution as a weapon *forced upon it* by the violence of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie; never did he renounce a preference for the peaceful way. In his introduction to the Second English Edition, published in England under the publishers' title, "In Defense of Terrorism," he explains the position as follows:

> "From the Fabians we may hear it objected that the English proletariat have it quite in their own hands to come to power by way of Parliament, to carry through peacefully, within the law and step by step, all the changes called for in the capitalist system, and by so doing not only to make revolutionary terrorism needless, but also to dig the ground away under the feet of counter-revolutionary adventurers. An outlook such as this has at first sight a particular persuasiveness in the light of the Labour Party's very important successes in the elections — but only at first sight, and that a very superficial one. The Fabian hope must, *I fear*, be held from the very beginning to be out of the question. *I say 'I fear,' since a peaceful, parliamentary change over to a new social structure would undoubtedly offer highly important advantages from the standpoint of the interests of culture, and therefore those of socialism.* But in politics nothing is more dangerous than to mistake what we wish for what is possible." (Trotsky: Introduction to Second English Edition of "In Defense of Terrorism," Page v. Our emphasis.)

We tried to say the same thing at the trial in our own words and in our own way, suited to the circumstances. In this classic formulation of the question, the legal and propagandistic advantages of our "preference for a peaceful transition" fall into their proper place beside, and subordinate to, the most weighty considerations of all: "The interests of culture, and *therefore* those of socialism."

Trotsky, again, in his introduction to the book on "The Living Thoughts of Marx," foretold a violent revolution for the United States, but he did not neglect to place the blame on the ruling class and express a different preference. Said Trotsky:

> "It would be best, of course, to achieve this purpose in a peaceful, gradual democratic way. But the social order that has outlived itself never yields its place to its successor without resistance." (Page 33.)

Lenin, as has been shown heretofore, denied the accusations

of Bolshevik responsibility for violence so often that more than one critic of that revolutionary time, sick with radicalism and impatient for "action," might well have reproached him for the "euphemistic, sweetened character" of his statements and taunted him with the ironical query: "Why not ask forgiveness, besides?" However that may be, Lenin, preparing the greatest mass action in history by means of propaganda, insisted right up to the end that he preferred the peaceful road.

On October 9-10 he promised support to the Soviets "in every way" if they would but assume power and thus secure a peaceful development:

> "The proletariat will stop before no sacrifices to save the revolution, which is impossible without the programme set forth above. On the other hand, the proletariat would support the Soviets in every way if they were to make use of their last chance for securing a peaceful development of the revolution." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XXI, Book 1, Page 264.)

In the same article he maintained that even at that late day the Soviets had the possibility — "probably their last chance" — to secure a peaceful development:

> "Having seized power, the Soviet could still at present — and this is probably their last chance — secure a peaceful development of the revolution, peaceful elections of the deputies by the people, a peaceful struggle of parties inside of the Soviets, a testing of the programmes of various parties in practice, a peaceful passing of power from one party to another." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XXI, Book 1, Pages 263-264.)

As late as September 29 he contended that in Russia, under the unique conditions which he cited, "an exceptional historic moment," a peaceful transformation was even *probable*:

> "The peaceful development of any revolution is, generally speaking, an extremely rare and difficult thing, for a revolution is the maximum sharpening of the sharpest class contradictions; but in a peasant country at a time when a union of the proletariat with the peasantry *can* give *peace* to the masses that are worn out by a most unjust and criminal war, when such a union can give the peasantry *all the land*, in such a country, at such an exceptional historic moment, a peaceful development of the revolution is *possible* and *probable* if all power passes to the Soviets. Within the Soviets the struggle of parties for power may proceed peacefully, with the Soviets fully democratised, with 'petty thefts' and defrauding of democratic principles eliminated — such as giving the soldiers one representative to every five hundred, while the workers have one representative to every thousand voters. In a democratic republic

such petty thefts are doomed to disappear." (Lenin: Collected Works — Vol. XXI, Book 1, Pages 237-238.)

Trotsky, in his "History," has explained this strategy of the Bolsheviks which was untainted by the fetishism of violence:

"The transfer of power to the soviets meant, in its immediate sense, a transfer of power to the Compromisers. That might have been accomplished peacefully, by way of a simple dismissal of the bourgeois government, which had survived only on the good will of the Compromisers and the relics of the confidence in them of the masses. The dictatorship of the workers and soldiers had been a fact ever since the 27th of February. But the workers and soldiers were not to the point necessary aware of that fact. They had confided the power to the Compromisers, who in their turn had passed it over to the bourgeoisie. The calculations of the Bolsheviks on a peaceful development of the revolution rested, not on the hope that the bourgeoisie would voluntarily turn over the power to the workers and soldiers, but that the workers and soldiers would in good season prevent the Compromisers from surrendering the power to the bourgeoisie.

"The concentration of the power in the soviets under a regime of soviet democracy, would have opened before the Bolsheviks a complete opportunity to become a majority in the soviet, and consequently to create a government on the basis of their program. For this end an armed insurrection would have been unnecessary. The interchange of power between parties could have been accomplished peacefully. All the efforts of the party from April to July had been directed towards making possible a peaceful development of the revolution through the soviet. 'Patiently explain' — that had been the key to the Bolshevik policy." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution — Vol. II, Pages 312-313.)

These words of the two greatest leaders of Marxism in action should have an instructive value for all revolutionary militants. Lenin's sincere and earnest talk about a "peaceful development of the revolution"; his offer to "make compromises" to assure "the last chance" for it; Trotsky's summary statement that the "key to the Bolshevik policy" had been the simple prescription: "patiently explain" — in all this it is shown that Lenin and Trotsky were completely free from radical bombast about violence. But in return, they organized a victorious proletarian revolution.

And they had prepared so well that the transfer of power did indeed take place in Petrograd without any large-scale violence. We did not falsify the historical fact at the trial when we said there was "just a little scuffling, that's all." (Socialism on Trial, Page 64.) The violence came afterward, initiated by the "pro-

slavery rebellion" which was eventually crushed by the mass force of the people led by the Bolshevik party. These impressive facts give the explanations and formulas of Lenin and Trotsky a certain authority for those who want to be Marxists.

5. "Submitting to the Majority"

Comrade Munis is dissatisfied with our assertions at the trial that "we submit to the majority." The Oehlerites also are scornful of this declaration and represent it as some kind of capitulatory repudiation of our principles in order to impress the jury. All these assumptions are without foundation. Our "submission to the majority" was not first revealed at the trial. We said it before the trial and continue to repeat it after the trial. It is a correct statement of our position because it conforms both to reality and necessity. Moreover, our Marxist teachers said it before us; we learned it from them.

What else can we do but "submit to the majority" if we are Marxists, and not Blanquists or anarchist muddle-heads? It is a timely occasion to probe into this question because we believe any ill-considered talk about some kind of mysterious "action," presumed to be open to us while we remain not only a minority, but a very small, numerically insignificant minority, can lead only to a dangerous disorientation of the party. An exposition of the Marxist position on this question can also be useful as an antidote for any remnants of the half-Blanquist tradition of the early years of the Comintern in America.

The pioneer communists in the United States (and not only here) heard of the Bolshevik victory in Russia long before they learned about the political method and propaganda techniques whereby the Bolsheviks gained the mass support which made the seizure of power possible. Their first impressions were undoubtedly colored by the capitalist press accounts which represented the revolution as a *coup d'etat* engineered by a small group. This distorted conception was epitomized by the title given to the American edition of Trotsky's classic pamphlet, "Terrorism and Communism," which was published here by the party's publishing house in 1922 under the completely misleading title: "Dictatorship versus Democracy." We took the "dictatorship," so to speak, and generously handed over to the bourgeoisie all claim to "democracy."

This was far too big a concession, perhaps pardonable in a young movement lacking adequate knowledge about the democratic

essence of the Bolshevik program, but by far out of date today. The bourgeoisie have always tried to picture communism as a "criminal conspiracy" in order to alienate the workers who are profoundly democratic in their sentiments. That was the aim once again in the Minneapolis trial. It was our task at the trial to go out of our way to refute this misrepresentation and emphasize the democratic basis of our program; not in order to placate our enemies and persecutors, as is assumed, but in order to reveal the truth to our friends, the American workers.

We cannot eat our cake and have it too. We must either "submit" to the majority and confine ourselves to propaganda designed to win over the majority — or, we must seize power, more correctly, *try* to seize power and break the neck of the party, by minority "action."

Marxist authority is clear and conclusive in choosing between these alternatives. When we took our stand in court regarding "submission" to the majority we were not "folding our arms" and making "opportunistic" statements of "passivity in the face of the imperialist war," as we are accused. Nothing of the sort. The testimony states, repeatedly, and with sufficient emphasis, that, while "submitting to the majority" — that is, making no minority insurrections or putsches — we are organizing, speaking, writing, and "explaining"; in other words, carrying on *propaganda* with the object of winning over the *majority* to our program, which is the program of social revolution.

Neither were we simply trying to "make an honorable impression on the jury without taking into consideration that we should talk for the masses." To be sure we did not stupidly disregard the jury which held the fate of 28 comrades, not to mention the legality of the party, in its hands. But we were speaking also, and *especially,* "for the masses." We testified primarily for publication. It was our deliberate aim to convince those who would read the testimony in printed form of the *truth* that the proletarian movement which we aspire to lead is a *democratic* movement, and not a "conspiracy," as the prosecutor and the whole of the capitalist press would picture it, and as loose talkers would unconsciously aid them to so picture it; not a scheme to transfer power from one clique to another, but a movement of the majority in the interest of the majority.

In addition, it may as well be said candidly that this testimony was also deliberately designed as an educational shock to such members and sympathizers of our movement as may still, at this

late day, be dabbling with the idea of a shorter cut to socialism by some mysterious prescription for "action."

The Marxist authorities have all spoken in one voice on this question.

The *Communist Manifesto*, the first, and the most fundamental statement of the principles of scientific socialism, defined the proletarian movement of emancipation, in contradistinction to all others in history, as follows:

> "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

The communist political method and strategy follow ineluctably from this basic premise. Nowhere and never have the authoritative representatives of Marxism formulated the question otherwise. The Marxists aim to make the social transformation *with* the majority and not *for* the majority. The irreconcilable struggle of Marx and Engels against the Blanquists revolved around this pivot.

In 1895, summing up the experience of fifty years, Engels wrote, in his Introduction to Marx' "Class Struggles in France":

> "The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of the unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisations, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for *(with body and soul)*. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that." (The Class Struggles in France, by Karl Marx—Marxist Library, Vol. XXIV, Page 25).

The successors of Marx and Engels followed in their footsteps. The experiences of the Russian revolution confirmed in life the basic premise of the founders of scientific socialism. It was precisely because Lenin and Trotsky had assimilated this concept into their flesh and blood that they knew how to concentrate their whole activity on propaganda *to win over the majority*, biding their time till they gained the majority, and resorting to "action" only when they felt assured of the support of the majority.

What did they do in the meantime? They *"submitted to the majority."* What else could they do? Lenin explained it a hundred times, precisely in those months and days when the Bolsheviks were consciously preparing the struggle for power. In his "April Theses" on "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revo-

lution," published in *Pravda* on April 20, 1917, a few days after his return to Russia, Lenin wrote:

> "As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time advocate the necessity of transferring the entire power of state to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the masses may by experience overcome their mistakes." (Lenin: Selected Works—Vol. VI, Page 23.)

A few days later, he returned to this question, explaining the reason for this attitude, the reason being that "we are not Blanquists, we are Marxists." On April 22 he wrote:

> "In order to obtain the power of state the class conscious workers must win the majority to their side. *As long as* no violence is used against the masses, there is no other road to power. We are not Blanquists, we are not in favour of the seizure of power by a minority. We are Marxists, we stand for a proletarian class struggle against chauvinist defencism, phrases, and dependence on the bourgeoisie." (Lenin: Selected Works—Vol. VI, Page 29.)

Not once or twice, but repeatedly and almost continually, so that neither friend nor foe could possibly misunderstand him, in the months directly preceding the October revolution, Lenin limited the Bolshevik task to the propaganda work of "criticizing," "exposing errors" and "advocating" in order to "win the majority to their side." This was not camouflage for the enemy but education for the workers' vanguard. He explained it theoretically as we, following him, tried to explain it in popular language at the trial.

Again, in April 1917, refuting the accusations of Plekhanov and others who accused the Bolsheviks of "anarchism, Blanquism, and so forth," Lenin once again explained the question, for the benefit, as he said, of "those who really want to think and learn." Into a few paragraphs he compresses a profound thesis which every member of the workers' vanguard ought to learn by heart. He wrote:

> "I absolutely insured myself in my theses against skipping over the still existing peasant movement, or the petty-bourgeois movement in general, against the workers' government *playing* at the 'seizure of power,' against any kind of Blanquist adventurism; for I directly referred to the experience of the Paris Commune. And this experience, as we know, and as was shown in detail by Marx in 1871 and by Engels in 1891, absolutely excluded Blanquism, absolutely ensured the direct, immediate and unconditional rule of the *majority* and the activity of the masses, but only to the extent of the *conscious* and intelligent action of the majority itself.
>
> "In the theses I definitely reduced the question to one of *a strug-*

gle for influence within the Soviets of Workers' Agricultural Labourers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. In order to leave no trace of doubt in this respect, I *twice* emphasized in the theses the necessity for patient and persistent 'explanatory' work 'adapted to the *practical needs of the masses.*'

"Ignorant persons or renegades from Marxism, such as Mr. Plekhanov, may cry anarchism, Blanquism, and so forth. But those who really want to think and learn cannot fail to understand that Blanquism means the seizure of power by a minority, whereas the Soviet of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are admittedly the direct and immediate organisation of the *majority* of the people. Work confined to a struggle for influence *within* these Soviets cannot, absolutely *cannot*, blunder into the swamp of Blanquism. Nor can it blunder into the swamp of anarchism, for anarchism *denies the necessity for a state and for state power in the period of transition* from the rule of the bourgeoisie to the rule of the proletariat, whereas I, with a precision that excludes all possibility of misunderstanding, *insist* on the necessity for a state in this period, although, in accordance with Marx and the experience of the Paris Commune, not the usual parliamentary bourgeois state, but a state *without* a standing army, *without* a police opposed to the people, *without* an officialdom placed above the people." (Lenin: Selected Works—Vol. VI, Pages 37-38.)

Again explaining wherein "Marxism differs from Blanquism" —he obviously considered it absolutely necessary for the advanced workers to understand this so as to be sure of their ground at every step—he wrote in a letter to the Central Committee of the party on September 26-27, 1917:

"To be successful, the uprising must be based not on a conspiracy, not on a party, but on the advanced class. This is the first point. The uprising must be based on the revolutionary upsurge of the people. This is the second point. The uprising must be based on the *crucial point* in the history of the maturing revolution, when the activity of the vanguard of the people is at its height, when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemies, and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted, undecided friends of the revolution are at their highest point.* This is the third point. It is in pointing out these three conditions as the way of approaching the question of an uprising, that Marxism differs from Blanquism." (Lenin: Collected Works—Vol. XXI, Book 1, Page 224.)

Naturally, when Lenin, or any other Marxist, spoke of the necessity of the revolutionary party having the support of the majority he meant the real majority whose sentiments are ascertainable in various ways besides the ballot box of the bourgeois state. On the eve of the insurrection he wrote his devastating

attack on Zinoviev and Kamenev who opposed the insurrection on the ground, among other things, that "we do not enjoy a majority among the people, and in the absence of that condition insurrection is hopeless."

Lenin, in "A Letter to the Comrades," written on October 29-30, scornfully dismissed the authors of this statement as "either distorters of the truth or pedants who desire at all costs, without the slightest regard for the true circumstances of the revolution, to have a guarantee in advance that the Bolshevik Party throughout the country has received exactly one half the number of votes plus one." Nevertheless, he took pains to prove the Bolsheviks had the majority by "facts": "The elections of August 20 in Petrograd"... "The elections to the Borough Dumas in Moscow in September"... "The new elections to the Soviets"... "The majority of the Peasants' Soviets" who had "expressed their opposition to the coalition"... "The *mass* of the soldiers"... "Finally ... the revolt of the peasantry." He concluded his argument on this point by saying: "No, to doubt now that the majority of the people are following and will follow the Bolsheviks is shameful vacillation."

Once again disavowing Blanquism, he wrote in his polemic against Zinoviev and Kamenev:

> **"A military conspiracy is Blanquism *if* it is not organized by the party of a definite class; *if* its organizers have not reckoned with the political situation in general and the international situation in particular; *if* the party in question does not enjoy the sympathy of the majority of the people, as proved by definite facts. . . ." (Lenin: Selected Works—Vol. VI, Pages 321-322.)**

On September 25-27 Lenin called upon the Bolshevik party to take power. In this famous letter, addressed "to the Central Committee, the Petrograd and Moscow Committees of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party," Lenin, with the logic and directness which characterized him, states his premise and his conclusion in the first sentence:

> **"Having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of both capitals, the Bolsheviks can and must take power into their hands."**

He was not worried about a "formal" majority; "no revolution ever waits for *this*." But he was sure of the *real* majority. He insisted upon the revolution "right now," as he expressed it, not sooner and not later, because:

> **"The majority of the people is *with* us. This has been proven by the long and difficult road from May 19 to August 12 and September**

25: the majority in the Soviets of the capitals is the *result* of the people's progress *to our side*. The vacillation of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and the strengthening of internationalists among them, is proof of the same thing." (Lenin: Collected Works—Vol. XXI, Book 1, Page 221.)

The prosecution at the Minneapolis trial attempted to convict us, as charged in the indictment, of an actual "conspiracy to overthrow the government by force and violence." We successfully refuted this accusation, and the indictment covering this point was rejected by the jury. The most effective element of our refutation of this absurd charge against our small party was our exposition of the democratic basis of the proletarian program, of the party's reliance on the majority to realize its program, and its corresponding obligation, while it remains in the minority, to "submit to the majority." In making this exposition we had a legal purpose, but not only a legal purpose, in mind. As with all the testimony, it was designed primarily to explain and simplify our views and aims to the workers who would be future readers of the published court record.

We also thought a restatement of the Marxist position in this respect would not be wasted on the members of our own movement, and might even be needed. The discussion which has arisen on this question only proves that we were more correct in this latter assumption than we realized at the time. Socialism is a democratic movement and its program, the program of the vanguard party, can be realized only with the support of the majority. The party's basic task, while it remains in the minority, is "propaganda to win over the majority." To state this was not capitulation to the prejudices of the jury; it is the teaching of Marx and Lenin, as has been shown in the foregoing references.

6. Marxism and War

Our insistence at the trial that we undertake revolutionary action only with the support of the majority and not over their heads has brought a criticism also in connection with our attitude toward war, but this criticism is no more valid than the others and has no more right to appeal to the authority of Lenin.

Comrade Munis quotes with sharp disapproval the following answer to a hypothetical question concerning what our attitude would be in the event of the United States entering the war (this was before the declaration of war):

"A decision has been made, and is accepted by the majority of the people, to go to war. Our comrades have to comply with that."

Munis widens the gap between his understanding of revolutionary policy and ours by strongly objecting to this, as it appears to us, obviously correct and necessary statement. He says:

> **"In the first place, the decision to go to war has *not* 'been made and accepted by a majority of the people.' This statement can be criticized very strongly, a statement that we would censure very energetically if it were made by a centrist. In place of accusing the government of leading the American people to the slaughter against the will of the majority, instead of accusing it emphatically before the masses and of demonstrating to them how the parliamentarian majority acts against the majority of the people, Cannon endorses Roosevelt's decision as if it really corresponded to the majority of the people."**

This impassioned rhetoric contains neither logic, nor Leninism, nor understanding of my statement, nor an answer to it. "In the first place," I didn't *"endorse* Roosevelt's decision, as if it really corresponded to the majority of the people." I said, "the decision (hypothetically) is *accepted* by a majority of the people," the decision which has been *"made"* by others, for obviously one does not "accept" a decision which he has made himself. But that is only a small point which illustrates that the testimony was carelessly read before it was even more carelessly criticized.*

In the essence of the matter, the majority do in fact *accept* and *support,* either actively or passively, the "decision to go to war." This is an incontestable fact, as shown by the complete absence of mass opposition. It is this attitude of the majority which we have to contend with. The fact that the decision was *made* by others does not help us. It is the attitude of the masses toward the decision that we must contend with.

What can and what should we, as Leninists, do while the masses maintain their present attitude? — that is the question. To make our position clear it is necessary to complete the answer given in the testimony which Munis broke off in the middle. He

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*** From similar carelessness in reading the testimony, Munis blithely represents us as "asking the expulsion from the party of the militants who organize *protests* in the army," and of "disauthorizing agitation and protests in the army." On the contrary, we defended the right of such agitation and protests, as a not too hasty reading of the testimony will convince anyone who is interested. What we "disauthorize" is futile and suicidal individual acts of insubordination and obstruction by members of our small party, acts which could only isolate them from the soldier mass under the given conditions and operate against the aim of winning over the majority. That is not the same thing as "disauthorizing agitation and protests in the army."**

stops with our statement that "our comrades have to comply" without adding the sentences which explain what is meant by "compliance." Here are the explanatory sentences:

> **"Insofar as they are eligible for the draft, they must accept that, along with the rest of their generation, and go and perform the duty imposed on them, *until such time as they convince the majority for a different policy.*"**

When the quotation is restored in full text it begins to look somewhat different than Munis hastily pictured it. It is nothing more or less than a warning to individual workers of the vanguard, who may be drafted, to "go with the rest of their generation" and not waste their energy and militancy on individual resistance, refusal of military service, etc. Was this warning correct? And was it necessary? As to the correctness of the warning, from the standpoint of Leninism, it will suffice to give two authoritative quotations. The first is a representative extract from Lenin's writings during the first World War:

> **"The idea of refusing to serve in the army, of strikes against the war, etc., is mere foolishness, it is the miserable and cowardly dream of an unarmed struggle against an armed bourgeoisie, it is a weak yearning for the abolition of capitalism without a desperate civil war or a series of wars." (Lenin: Collected Works — Volume XVIII, Page 88.)**

The second quotation is from the fundamental theses, "War and the Fourth International":

> **"If the proletariat should find it beyond its power to prevent war by means of revolution,—and this is the only means of preventing war, —the workers, together with the whole people will be forced to *participate in the army and in the war.*" (Page 33.)**

This truth is presumably known to all revolutionists. But it was not always known. During the first World War many of the best proletarian militants in the United States knew no other way to express their principled opposition to the imperialist war than by individual resistance to conscription, objection to and refusal of military service, etc. Much precious energy and courage were wasted that way. In testifying before the court, with a view to the publication of the testimony, we assumed that rank and file worker militants, to whom Lenin's tactics are as yet unknown, might read and be influenced by this warning to "accept" with the masses — "until such time as they convince the majority for a different policy." Our words were primarily directed to them.

We were not even dreaming either of "endorsing Roosevelt's decision" or of having to defend this ABC formulation within

our own movement. We simply intended to say, in words and tone which we thought most efficacious from a propagandistic standpoint in the situation, what Lenin said in February 1915:

> **"What should the Belgian Socialists have done? Since they could not accomplish a social revolution together with the French, etc., *they had to submit to the majority of the nation* at the present moment and go to war. . . .'Citizens of Belgium! . . . We are in the minority; *I submit to you and go to war*, but even in the war I shall preach; I shall prepare the civil war of the proletariat of all countries because outside of it there is no salvation for the peasants and workers of Belgium and of other countries!'" (Lenin: Collected Works—Vol. XVIII, Pages 115-116. Our emphasis.)**

Lenin, you see, "submits to the majority." While he is in the minority, what does he do? He "preaches" and "prepares." If this policy "can be criticized very strongly," then let the criticism be directed against Lenin. He is the author of the policy. We learned from him.

Munis quotes a sentence in the testimony: "We would not support the war in a political sense." Now, this single sentence, even standing by itself, is perfectly correct. But Munis is greatly dissatisfied with it.

> **"Why, then, equivocate so dangerously?" he asks. "I see no other reason but that our comrades have committed the very grave error of talking for a petty-bourgeois jury for the more immediate present, not foreseeing the future struggles. Would it not have been better to state: 'We submit to your war, American bourgeois, because the violence of your society imposes it on us, *the material violence of your arms*. But the masses *will* turn against you. From today on, our party is *with* the masses in an irreconcilable struggle against your regime of oppression, misery and butchery. Therefore we will fight against your war with *all means*.'" (Our emphasis.)**

This agitational substitute for the position we elucidated at the trial is false from beginning to end, as we shall demonstrate.

The testimony explains what we mean by "political opposition":

> **"A: By that we mean that we do not give any support to any imperialist war. We do not vote for it; we do not vote for any person that promotes it; we do not speak for it; we do not write for it. We are in opposition to it." (Socialism on Trial, page 47.)**

A declaration of war by the United States Government would not change our position:

> **"Q: If the United States should enter into the European conflict, what form would the opposition of the Party take to the war?**
>
> **"A: We would maintain our position.**

"Q: And that is what,

"A: That is, we would not become supporters of the war, even after the war was declared. That is, we would remain an opposition political party on the war question, as on others.

"Q: You would not support the war?

"A: That is what I mean, we would not support the war, in a political sense." (Socialism on Trial, Page 48.)

Under cross-examination by the prosecuting attorney the position was made more emphatic and precise:

"Q: And you will seek to utilize war, during the war, to destroy the present form of Government, will you not?

"A: Well, that is no secret, that we want to change this form of government.

"Q: And you look forward, do you not, to the forthcoming war as the time when you may be able to accomplish that?

"A: Yes, I think the forthcoming war will unquestionably weaken the imperialist governments in all countries.

"Q: You said, I believe, that you will not support the war? You do not believe in National Defense at all, do you?

"A: Not in imperialist countries, no.

"Q: I am speaking of this country?

"A: I believe 100 per cent in defending this country by our own means, but I do not believe in defending the imperialist governments of the world—

"Q: I am speaking about the Government of the United States as it is now constitutionally constituted. You do not believe in defending that, do you?

"A: Not in a political sense, no.

"Q: You do not believe in defending it in any sense, do you?

"A: I explained the other day, if the majority of the people decide on war, and participate in the war, our people and the people under our influence will also participate in the war. We do not sabotage the war, we do not obstruct it, but we continue to propagate our ideas, calling for a cessation of the war and calling for a change in government." (Socialism on Trial, Page 106.)

When Mr. Schweinhaut, pursuing the question to the very end, introduced the summary paragraph of the War Manifesto of the Fourth International, he was answered by an affirmation of that document which was completely devoid of any "ambiguity" or "inexactness":

"Q: Now, on June 29, 1940, the *Socialist Appeal* published this from the report of the Manifesto of the Fourth International: 'Independently of the course of the war, we fulfill our basic task: We explain to the workers the irreconcilability between their interests and the interest of blood-thirsty capitalism; we mobilize the toilers

against imperialism; we propagate the unity of the workers in all warring and neutral countries; we call for the fraternization of workers and soldiers within each country, and of soldiers with soldiers on the opposite side of the battle front; we mobilize the women and youth against the war; we carry on constant, persistent, tireless preparation of the revolution—in the factories, in the mills, in the villages, in the barracks, at the front and in the fleet.' You want the soldiers to do that, don't you?"

"A: Yes, I think that is a summation of the idea, for the soldiers and everybody to do that. That is the way to put an end to this slaughter." (Socialism on Trial, Page 111.)

In the face of these quotations from the court record one is reasonably entitled to ask: What does Comrade Munis want of us? What more needs to be said before the capitalist court, or in a popular propagandistic exposition anywhere? Neither Lenin nor Trotsky, to judge by their own writings, would demand more of our party.

Trotsky, who was an internationalist to his heart's core, explained that a socialist party, which was in the minority at the outbreak of the first World War, was required to and *could only,* take up a position of *political opposition* until such time as "the change in the feeling of the working masses came about." That is the way he expounded the problem in "War and the International." This book, written during the first World War and published in the United States under the publisher's title, "The Bolsheviki and World Peace," is one of the classics upon which our movement has been raised and educated. Trotsky wrote:

"The advance guard of the Social Democracy feels it is in the minority; its organizations, in order to complete the organization of the army, are wrecked. Under such conditions there can be no thought of a revolutionary move on the part of the Party. And all this is quite independent of whether the people look upon a particular war with favor or disfavor. In spite of the colonial character of the Russo-Japanese war and its unpopularity in Russia, the first half year of it nearly smothered the revolutionary movement. Consequently it is quite clear that, with the best intentions in the world, the Socialist parties cannot pledge themselves to obstructionist action at the time of mobilization, at a time, that is, when Socialism is more than ever politically isolated.

"And therefore there is nothing particularly unexpected or discouraging in the fact that the working-class parties did not oppose military mobilization with their own revolutionary mobilization. Had the Socialists limited themselves to expressing condemnation of the

present War, had they declined all responsibility for it and refused the vote of confidence in their governments as well as the vote for the war credits, they would have done their duty at the time. They would have taken up a position of waiting, the oppositional character of which would have been perfectly clear to the government as well as to the people. Further action would have been determined by the march of events and by those changes which the events of a war must produce on the people's consciousness. The ties binding the International together would have been preserved, the banner of Socialism would have been unstained. Although weakened for the moment, the Social Democracy would have preserved a free hand for a decisive interference in affairs as soon as the change in the feelings of the working masses came about." (The Bolsheviki and World Peace —Pages 175-177.)

The same idea was explained over again by Trotsky twenty-two years later in his testimony before the Dewey Commission in 1937. He still prescribes "political opposition" as a revolutionary method. At that time France had a military alliance with the Soviet Union and he was asked the hypothetical question by Stolberg:

"You are a responsible revolutionary figure. Russia and France already have a military alliance. Suppose an international war breaks out... What would you say to the French working class in reference to the defense of the Soviet Union? 'Change the French bourgeois government,' would you say?"

Trotsky's answer is especially interesting to us, since the United States today stands in the position of France of 1937 in relation to the Soviet Union, and the hypothetical war has become a reality:

"This question is more or less answered in the theses, 'The War and the Fourth International,' in this sense: In France I would remain in opposition to the Government and would develop systematically this opposition. In Germany I would do anything I could to sabotage the war machinery. They are two different things. In Germany and in Japan, I would apply military methods as far as I am able to fight, oppose, and injure the machinery, the military machinery of Japan, to disorganize it, both in Germany and Japan. In France, it is political opposition against the bourgeoisie, and the preparation of the proletarian revolution. Both are revolutionary methods. But in Germany and Japan I have as my immediate aim the disorganization of the whole machinery. In France, I have the aim of the proletarian revolution." (The Case of Leon Trotsky, Pages 289-290.)

In his "April Theses," which is a sufficiently authoritative

document, since it was the program for the revolutionary struggle of the Bolsheviks in Russia under conditions of war, Lenin thought it enough, in dealing with the question of war and the government, to say: "not the slightest concession must be made to 'revolutionary defensism'"; "No support must be given to the Provisional Government" because it is "a government of capitalists"; power must be transferred to the Soviet; and then to add:

> **"In view of the undoubted honesty of the mass of the rank-and-file believers in revolutionary defensism, who accept the war as a necessity only and not as a means of conquest; in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary thoroughly, persistently and patiently to explain their error to them." (Lenin: Selected Works, Vol. VI, Pages 21-22.)**

Political opposition ("No support to the Provisional Government") and *propaganda* ("patiently explain") — these are the weapons with which Lenin and Trotsky prepared and finally carried through the proletarian revolution. They will suffice for us too. Our propagandistic explanations of our war policy in the Minneapolis court room are neither "opportunistic" nor "equivocal." They contain the essence of the teachings and practice of Lenin and Trotsky.

The alternative formulas of Comrade Munis, however, contain one error after another. According to him, we should have said:

"We submit to your war, American bourgeois, because the violence of your society imposes it upon us, the material violence of your arms."

That is not correct. If that were so we would have no right to condemn acts of individual resistance. When militant workers are put in fascist prisons and concentration camps because of their socialist opinions and activities they submit, but only through compulsion, to "the material violence of arms." Consequently, individuals or small groups are encouraged and aided to "desert," to make their escape whenever a favorable opportunity presents itself, without waiting for and without even consulting the majority of the other prisoners in regard to the action. The revolutionary movement gains by such individual "desertions" because they can restore the prisoner to revolutionary effectiveness which is largely shut off in prison. Trotsky, for example, twice "deserted" from Siberia without incurring any criticism from the revolutionists.

Compulsory military service in war is an entirely different matter. In this case we submit primarily to *the majority of the*

workers who accept and support the war either actively or passively. Since we cannot achieve our socialist aims without the majority we must go with them, share their hardships and hazards, and win them over to our side by propaganda on the basis of common experiences. To accept military service under such circumstances is a revolutionary necessity. Individual resistance, objection, desertion, etc. in this case — directly contrary to that of prisoners escaping from "the violence of arms" — constitute desertion of class duty. The party, which applauds and aids the escaping prisoner, condemns draft dodgers and deserters. The escaped prisoner frees himself to resume revolutionary work. The individual deserter from the military service cuts himself off from the mass who have to make the revolution and thereby destroys his value.

"From today on," Munis would have us say, "our party is with the masses in an irreconcilable struggle against your regime of oppression, misery and butchery. Therefore we will fight against your war with all means."

The regime of the bourgeoisie is here justly described. The rest of it is incorrect and contradictory; it "skips a stage" in the evolution of the attitude of the masses toward the war, and precisely that stage which must be the point of departure for our propaganda — *the present stage*. To say to the bourgeoisie, "The masses *will* turn against you" in the future, means only that they have not yet done so. It cannot logically be followed by the assertion, "from *today* on, our party is *with the masses* in an irreconcilable struggle, etc."

The masses *today,* thanks to all kinds of compulsions and deceptions, and the perfidious role of the labor bureaucracy and the renegade socialists and Stalinists, are accepting and supporting the war, that is, they are acting *with the bourgeoisie* and not with us. The problem for our party is, first, to *understand* this primary fact; second, to take up a position of *"political opposition"*; and then, on that basis, to seek an approach to the honestly patriotic workers and try to win them away from the bourgeoisie and over to our side by means of *propaganda.* That is the only "action" that is open to us, as a small minority, at the present time.

It is also incorrect to say "we will fight against your war with *all* means." While we are in the minority we fight with the Marxist weapons of political opposition, criticism and propaganda for a workers' program and a workers' government. We reject the pacifist "means" of abstention, the anarchist "means" of in-

dividual sabotage and the Blanquist "means" of minority insurrection, the putsch.

It would appear that Munis' erroneous explanation of the primary reason why a minority revolutionary party "submits" to the war, his tendency to skip a stage in the workers' development and his lack of precision in speaking of the struggle against the war by "all means" — these errors lead him to slide over to equally loose and ill-considered formulations as to those means of struggle which are open, and advantageous, to the minority party of revolutionary socialism.

7. Marxism and Sabotage

The everlasting talk about "action," as if a small minority party has at its disposal, besides its propaganda — its "explanations" — some other weapons vaguely described as "actions" but not explicitly defined, can only confuse and becloud the question and leave the door open for sentiments of an anarchistic and Blanquist nature. We, following all the Marxist teachers, thought it necessary to exclude such conceptions in order to safeguard the party from the danger of condemning itself to futility and destruction before it gets a good start on its real task at this time: to *explain* to the masses and win over the majority.

That is why we utilized the forum of the trial to speak so explicitly about our rejection of sabotage. That is why we denied all accusations in this respect so emphatically. Not — with Munis' permission — for lack of "valor," but because, as Marxists, we do not believe in sabotage, terrorism, or any other device which substitutes the actions of individuals or small groups for the action of the masses.

There can be no two positions on this question. Marxist authorities are universal on one side — against sabotage as an independent means of revolutionary struggle. This "weapon" belongs in the arsenal of anarchism.

Sabotage was once the fashion in this country — in the politically primitive days before the first World War. Imported from France where it was advertised as a miraculous remedy by the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, sabotage was taken up by the I.W.W., the left socialists, and the radical intellectuals, who in those days had a decidedly anarchistic hue. It seemed for a time to offer a wonderful short cut to victory for a movement which wasn't doing so well with the humdrum job of educating and organizing the workers for mass action.

The consequences of this anarchistic folly were disastrous for the I.W.W. The advocacy of sabotage only repelled the masses and left the I.W.W. members in a legally indefensible position. To avoid complete alienation from the workers, and for sheer self-preservation of the organization in the face of prosecutions during the war, the I.W.W. was compelled to drop the "weapon" of sabotage overboard with the most unseemly haste.

Those who have memories of this unhappy experience, especially those who, as participants in the American syndicalist movement, burned their fingers on this hot poker, will be least of all inclined to play with the idea of sabotage again. Sabotage is not the slogan of proletarian power and confidence but of petty-bourgeois futility and despair.

The fundamental theses, "War and the Fourth International," state categorically:

> **"Individualistic and anarchistic slogans of refusal to undergo military service, passive resistance, desertion, sabotage are *in basic contradiction* to the methods of the proletarian revolution." (War and the Fourth International—Page 33. Our emphasis.)**

Lenin wrote:

> **"Not the *sabotaging* of the war, not undertaking sporadic individual acts in this direction, but the conducting of *mass propaganda* (and not only among 'civilians') that leads to the transformation of the war into civil war.... *We do not sabotage the war*, but we struggle against chauvinism. . . ." (Lenin: Collected Works, Vol. XVIII, Page 74. Our emphasis.)**

Munis is especially indignant at our rejection of sabotage in the testimony, but he is wrong in his criticism and wrong even, it would appear, in his understanding of the question:

> **"The defendants," he says, "saw themselves forced to condemn sabotage in general, as though it dealt with something criminal."**

Again:

> **"For moments there is evidence that the defendants really consider sabotage a crime. If I am mistaken—and I hope I am—this is a dangerous moral predisposition."**

To that we can only answer with the French expression: "It is worse than a crime — it is a blunder." As to the "moral" aspect of the question — that does not exist for us. Our considerations in this respect are exclusively political.

Of course, if one wants to discard precision of definitions and dump everything into one pot loosely described as "actions," disregarding proportion, circumstance, and the relation between actions which are *primary* and *fundamental* and those which are

subordinate and *auxiliary* — in that case we can argue endlessly in a closed circle. But Marxism abhors vagueness of expression; it calls things by their right names — precisely.

Sabotage, to us, means individual acts of obstruction and destruction, substituted for mass action. That is the way Marxism defines it and, thereby, condemns it. Similarly, individual terrorism. But it is necessary to understand that such actions have one quality when employed as *substitutes* for mass action and another quality when subordinated to and absorbed by mass action. Marxism is opposed to terrorist assassinations, for example, but not to wars of liberation waged by the oppressed masses, even though wars entail some killing of obnoxious individuals. So, also, with acts of obstruction and destruction as *part of* and *subordinate to* wars waged by the masses, not as substitutes for them. "Terrorism" and "sabotage" are then no longer the same things. Everything changes, including the attitude of Marxists, according to what is *dominant* and what is *subordinate* in the circumstances.

Thus, if it is argued that Trotsky, in his answer to Stolberg, asked for sabotage of the military machinery in Germany and Japan, it must be pointed out that his proposal was made only in the event of war against the Soviet Union. Then sabotage in Germany and Japan would be not an independent revolutionary action but a secondary military measure of support to the mass action of the Red Army. Trotsky never asked for sabotage as a means of overthrowing a fascist or any other type of bourgeois regime from within.

Comrade Munis seems to invest sabotage with a virtue in its own right. We, on the other hand, admit "sabotage" only as a minor auxiliary factor in mass actions; that is, when it is no longer sabotage in the proper sense of the term. The difference is quite fundamental.

Munis writes: "I believe that sabotage is a method for tactical use whose application *at certain moments* can be productive of contrary effects to what is intended." (Our emphasis.)

This is putting the question upside down. Sabotage produces "contrary effects," not once in a while but always, when it is employed by itself as a substitute for mass action; like all anarchistic methods it tends to disorganize and demoralize the mass movement which alone can bring us to socialism through the proletarian revolution. Munis' formulation, contrasted to that of Trotsky in his article, "Learn to Think," shows a great difference of conception. Trotsky wrote:

"The proletarian party does not resort to artificial methods, such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, etc., in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful on this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. . . .

"The methods of struggle change, of course, when the struggle enters the openly revolutionary phase. Civil war is a war, and in this aspect has its particular laws. In civil war, bombing of warehouses, wrecking of trains and all other forms of military 'sabotage' are inevitable. Their appropriateness is decided by purely military considerations—civil war continues revolutionary politics but by other, precisely, military means." (Trotsky: Learn to Think, The New International, Vol. IV—No. 7, Page 207.)

Sabotage is admissible as a weapon of the proletarian movement only "in quotation marks" as elucidated by Trotsky. That is, when, strictly speaking, it is no longer sabotage, but a minor military measure supplementing mass action. Whoever speaks of sabotage in any other framework does not speak the language of Marxism.

8. Defensive Formulations and the Organization of Action

In general, it may be said that the source of all the criticism of our expositions at the Minneapolis trial is to be found in the apparent rejection of defensive formulations, and in counterposing "offensive action" to them. But the essence of the whole question consists in this, that defensive formulations prepare and help to create genuine mass actions, while "calls to action," not so prepared, usually echo in the void. It is not by accident that those revolutionists who understand this are precisely the ones who have shown the capacity to organize actions when the conditions for them are present. The ultra-left sectarians, meantime, who do not understand the best mechanism for the organization of actions — that is, precisely, defensive formulations — always remain alone and isolated with their impatient slogans and their self-imagined intransigeance.

Our critics explain our resort to defensive formulations by the theory that our strategy in court was determined above all by concern to obtain light sentences. "Our comrades. . .try to make an honorable impression on the jury without taking into consideration that they should talk for the masses." We seem to "have

one policy for the masses and another for appearances before a bourgeois judge."

However, this appraisal of the motives of the defendants, which falls short of flattery, is somewhat contradicted by the fact that we immediately published the testimony in our press and then republished it in thousands of copies in pamphlet form, "for the masses." We do not deny anyone the right to his opinion as to the moral content of our conduct at the trial, and we do not intend even to debate the question on that ground. In this domain "actions speak louder than words." But we shall attempt a political exposition, basing ourselves on Marxist authority, of the role of defensive formulations in the organization of proletarian mass action.

Also, defensive formulations are an indispensable medium for teaching the masses, who will not be convinced by theory but only by their own experience and propaganda related thereto. This experience of the masses proceeds in the main along the line of defensive actions. That is why defensive formulations are most easily comprehensible and represent the best approach of the revolutionary Marxists to the masses. Finally, it is a tactical and legal consideration of no small importance in a bourgeois-democratic country that defensive formulas partially disarm the class enemy; or in any case, make their attacks more difficult and costly. Why should such advantages be thrown away?

Defensive formulations retain their efficiency in all actions involving masses, from the most elementary economic strikes to the open struggle for power. Those who aspire to organize action ought to know this.

American economic strikes have been explosively violent, and the violence has not all been on one side. The instinctive militancy of the workers, as revealed in these strikes, would indicate that when the time comes for grandiose revolutionary actions, these same workers will remain true to their tradition and not be paralyzed by Quakerism.

Every strike leader worth his salt knows, however, that strikers are not mobilized and sent into action against strike-breakers, thugs and law-breaking cops by lecturing them on the virtues of violence and "calling" them to take the "offensive." The workers, militant and courageous as they may be, prefer victory by peaceful means; and in this they only show good sense. In addition strikers, at the beginning, almost invariably entertain illusions about the impartiality of the public authorities and tend to assume that they,

as well as the bosses and their hirelings, will respect the rights of the strikers and the justice of their cause.

They need experience, which as a rule is soon forthcoming, to change their attitude and move them to militant action. They need also some assurance that legal right is on their side. Strike leaders who seek not self-expression but victory in the strike, who understand that it can be won only by means of mass solidarity and mass action, must take these illusions and sentiments of the workers into account as the point of departure. Strike leaders can in no case begin with loose-mouthed "calls" for violent offensive action of the strikers. The first task is to *explain* the implacable nature of the struggle in which the self-interest of the bosses excludes fair play, and the role of the public authorities as political servants of the bosses; the second task is to *warn* the workers to expect violent attacks; and the third task is to prepare and organize the workers to *defend themselves and their rights*. Along these lines, and as a rule only along these lines, the struggle can be consciously developed in tempo and scope. The most effective mass action of the strikers, as every experienced organizer of mass actions knows, is organized and carried out under *defensive slogans*.

Matters are no different when the workers' mass action ascends from the elementary field of the economic strike to the topmost peak of the class struggle — the open fight for political power. Here also the action proceeds under defensive slogans and, to a very large extent, also under cover of legality. Trotsky has demonstrated this so convincingly in his monumental "History of the Russian Revolution," that there remains no ground for serious debate in our ranks on the subject. To the student it should be sufficient to say: There is the book; go and read it. To the critic who imagines, without having thought the matter out, that defensive formulations signify squeamishness or hedging on principle, we say and we shall prove: That is the way the Great Russian Revolution was organized and carried through to victory.

Here is the way Trotsky explains the question:

"The attacking side is almost always interested in seeming on the defensive. A revolutionary party is interested in legal coverings. The coming Congress of Soviets, although in essence a Soviet of revolution, was nevertheless for the whole popular mass indubitably endowed, if not with the whole sovereignty, at least with a good half of it. It was a question of one of the elements of a dual power making an insurrection against the other. Appealing to the Congress as the source of authority, the Military Revolutionary Committee accused the government in advance of preparing an attempt against

the soviets. This accusation flowed logically from the whole situation. Insofar as the government did not intend to capitulate without a fight it could not help getting ready to defend itself. But by this very fact it became liable to the accusation of conspiracy against the highest organ of the workers, soldiers and peasants. In its struggle against the Congress of Soviets which was to overthrow Kerensky, the government lifted its hand against that source of power from which Kerensky had issued.

"It would be a serious mistake to regard all this as juridical hair-splitting of no interest to the people. On the contrary, it was in just this form that the fundamental facts of the revolution reflected themselves in the minds of the masses." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 279. Our emphasis.)

Again:

"Although an insurrection can win only on the offensive, it develops better, the more it looks like self-defense. A piece of official sealing-wax on the door of the Bolshevik editorial rooms—as a military measure that is not much. But what a superb signal for battle!" (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Pages 207-208.)

On the night of the victorious insurrection the Bolsheviks accused the official government as "conspirators" making an "assault" which had to be forcibly resisted:

"Telephonograms to all districts and units of the garrison announced the event: 'The enemy of the people took the offensive during the night. The Military Revolutionary Committee is leading the resistance to the assault of the conspirators.' The conspirators—these were the institutions of the official government. From the pen of revolutionary conspirators this term came as a surprise, but it wholly corresponded to the situation and to the feelings of the masses." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 208.)

This accusation was broadcast to the whole country. The insurrection was justified as a reply to the "offensive" of the enemy:

"The sailor Kurkov has remembered: 'We got word from Trotsky to broadcast . . . that the counter-revolution had taken the offensive.' Here too the defensive formulation concealed a summons to insurrection addressed to the whole country." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 208.)

At every step, as the struggle unfolded and neared its climax, the Bolsheviks clung to their defensive formula, not as a petty deception but because that is the way the issue appeared to the workers and soldiers. Even at a caucus of Bolshevik delegates to the Soviet Congress, held on October 24, that is, the day of the

insurrection, they still found it necessary to retain the "defensive envelope of the attack." Says Trotsky:

> **"There could be no talk of expounding before this caucus the whole plan of the insurrection. Whatever is said at a large meeting inevitably gets abroad. It was still impossible even to throw off the defensive envelope of the attack without creating confusion in the minds of certain units of the garrison. But it was necessary to make the delegates understand that a decisive struggle had already begun, and that it would remain only for the Congress to crown it." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 211.)**

On October 23, the day before the insurrection, an all-city conference of the Red Guard was held in Petrograd. The resolution adopted by the conference, says Trotsky:

> **"defined the Red Guard as 'an organization of the armed forces of the proletariat for the struggle against counter-revolution and the defense of the conquests of the revolution.' Observe this: that twenty-four hours before the insurrection the task was still defined in terms of defense and not attack." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 188.)**

Naturally, being Bolsheviks, their "defense" had nothing in common with the policy of folded arms. They were prepared for eventualities but they never gave up the advantage of "seeming on the defensive." Trotsky spoke at the caucus of Bolshevik delegates on the 24th:

> **"Referring to recent articles of Lenin, Trotsky demonstrated that 'a conspiracy does not contradict the principles of Marxism,' if objective relations make an insurrection possible and inevitable. 'The physical barrier on the road to power must be overcome by a blow. . . .' However, up till now the policy of the Military Revolutionary Committee has not gone beyond the policy of self-defense. Of course this self-defense must be understood in a sufficiently broad sense. To assure the publication of the Bolshevik press with the help of armed forces, or to retain the Aurora in the waters of the Neva—'Comrades, is that not self-defense?—It is defense!' If the government intends to arrest us, we have machine guns on the roof of Smolny in preparation for such an event. 'That also, comrades, is a measure of defense.'" (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Pages 211-212.)**

Trotsky painstakingly explains how the October revolution was developed by defensive formulations from link to link over a period of thirteen or sixteen days during which "hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers took direct action, defensive in form, but aggressive in essence." At the end of that time, the

masses being fully mobilized, there remained "only a rather narrow problem"—the insurrection, the success of which was assured.

"The October revolution can be correctly understood only if you do not limit your field of vision to its final link. During the last days of February the chess game of insurrection was played out from the first move to the last—that is to the surrender of the enemy. At the end of October the main part of the game was already in the past. And on the day of insurrection it remained to solve only a rather narrow problem: mate in two moves. The period of revolution, therefore, must be considered to extend from the 9th of October, when the conflict about the garrison began, or from the 12th, when the resolution was passed to create a Military Revolutionary Committee. The enveloping maneuver extended over more than two weeks. The more decisive part of it lasted five to six days—from the birth of the Military Revolutionary Committee to the capture of the Winter Palace. During this whole period hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers took direct action, defensive in form, but aggressive in essence. The final stage, when the insurrectionaries at last threw off the qualifications of the dual power with its dubious legality and defensive phraseology, occupied exactly twenty-four hours: from 2 o'clock on the night of the 25th to 2 o'clock on the night of the 26th." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 294.)

Up to the decisive moment the Bolsheviks not only insisted on the defensive form of their actions; they also held onto Soviet legality "of which the masses were extremely jealous." It must have been a shock to Mr. Schweinhaut, the government prosecutor at the Minneapolis trial, when we defended the "legality" of the October revolution. He, like many others, imagined that Bolsheviks disdainfully cast aside such trifles as legal justifications even when they are available. The prosecutor must have been still more discomfitted when we proved the legality of the revolution under cross-examination. And we were not dissimulating. Trotsky explained this question also in his refutation of Professor Pokrovsky who had attempted to make fun of the "legalistic" contentions of the Bolsheviks. Trotsky would not let such arguments pass even in the guise of jesting remarks. He answered:

"Professor Pokrovsky denies the very importance of the alternative: Soviet or party. Soldiers are no formalists, he laughs: they did not need a Congress of Soviets in order to overthrow Kerensky. With all its wit such a formulation leaves unexplained the problem: Why create soviets at all if the party is enough? 'It is interesting,' continues the professor, 'that nothing at all came of this aspiration to do everything almost legally, with soviet legality, and the power at the last moment was taken not by the Soviet, but by an obviously "illegal"

organization created *ad hoc*.' Pokrovsky here cites the fact that Trotsky was compelled 'in the name of the Military Revolutionary Committee,' and not the Soviet, to declare the government of Kerensky non-existent. A most unexpected conclusion! The Military Revolutionary Committee was an elected organ of the Soviet. The leading role of the Committee in the overturn did not in any sense violate that soviet legality which the professor makes fun of but of which the masses were extremely jealous." (Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution—Vol. III, Page 288.)

After these explanations of Trotsky about the defensive slogans whereby the Bolsheviks organized their victorious struggle for power it should not be necessary to say anything more on the subject. The method here acquires unimpeachable authority by virtue of the fact that it was not only expounded, but also successfully applied to the greatest revolution in history. In this light the defensive formulations employed by us in the Minneapolis trial, far from being repudiated, must be underscored more decisively. They are the right formulations for a propagandistic approach to the American workers. And they are the best methods for the mobilization of the workers for mass action throughout all stages of the development of the proletarian revolution in the United States.
New York, May 1942.

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